

*HEZEKIAH  
AND HIS AGE*



*ROBERT SINKER, D.D.*













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HEZEKIAH AND HIS AGE.

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# HEZEKIAH AND HIS AGE.

BY

ROBERT SINKER, D.D.,

*Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge.*



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TO

THE REV. H. C. G. MOULE, D.D.,

PRINCIPAL OF RIDLEY HALL, CAMBRIDGE, AND FORMERLY

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE,

MY FRIEND OF MANY YEARS,

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED.





## PREFACE.

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IT was my fortune some time ago to hear a distinguished dignitary of the Church preach on the question of the permanent importance of the Old Testament. The preacher evidently seemed to think that the permanent element was not very large. The earlier history of pre-Mosaic times was largely mythical and allegorical; the history of the later kingdom was very inaccurate, when tested by newly discovered records, and was at best but the story of an obscure nationality of Western Asia, dwelling under the shadow of great imperial powers. I wondered what was left; but when the preacher said that there was one book of the Old Testament which answered in a marked way to the cravings of the present day, I at once guessed that he meant the Psalter, alike precious to cottager and to philosopher, to every type of men age after age. My guess, however, was wrong; it was not the Psalter, it was Ecclesiastes, a book which answered strikingly to the pessimistic tendencies of the present age. That Ecclesiastes is really pessimistic we are not at all prepared to admit, but this is not the place to enter into the question: that the pre-Mosaic story is un-historic, however much reckless writers have urged it,

and however many unstable readers have weakly acquiesced, is a statement which, as fresh and fresh discoveries pour in, we think the neo-critical school—votaries of a science often falsely so-called—will seek more and more, as time goes on, to fence about with numerous limiting conditions. Who was the French savant who said “I cannot be so credulous as to be unbelieving”? After such books as, for example, Dr. Hommel’s recent work, one feels disposed to ask, On which side is the credulity?

But now what of the later history, the period where the Bible story is paralleled and faced with records which the last few generations have seen unearthed from the repose of millenniums? How far has the credibility of the Bible story been strengthened or shaken by the discovery of the records yielded by the mounds which once were cities by the Tigris or Euphrates? Let it be remembered, before any answer is attempted, how absolutely and essentially different is the aim, the purpose, the intention, of the Bible story and of the cuneiform inscriptions. The former is the record of a tiny and isolated nation, and that record not mainly, or even primarily, annalistic, but a setting forth of the development of God’s purpose as shewn in the history of Israel, as that purpose grew to a broader horizon. The Assyrian tablets, except when they are simply annalistic, mere lists of years receiving their designations from their eponyms, or a bare list of campaigns, year by

year, are largely boastful self-glorifications by monarch after monarch on his victories. We are then led to one or two important thoughts, which must be kept well in sight in every comparison.

In the first place, Israel and Judah, when once they became vassals of Assyria, were, save for the telling position they held by the threshold of Egypt, but unimportant factors in the "high politics" of the time—merely pawns on the imperial chess-board. What we may expect to learn of Israel and Judah from the cuneiform inscriptions is the light in which they were viewed in the imperial politics of the day, what they contributed to the development of imperial schemes; in no sense can we look for enlightenment as to the growth of Israelite or Judean national life, in its inner aspects. The religion of Christ overthrew Imperial Rome and her gods; yet, if we look to heathen writers during the period from the dawn of Christianity to the age of Constantine, how little save mere glimpses do we gain of the unceasing contest. If one had to write a history of the struggle between Christianity and heathenism during the first three centuries, drawn from heathen writers only, how strangely fragmentary would be the result. Yet that struggle was a fiercer, a more continuous, a more critical one, than all the wars of the legions. So, too, if we try to write a history of Israel from Assyrian sources only. Putting all the personal arrogance out of the way, the writers of those records

were utterly unconscious as to what the important issues of their times really were.

But there is a further point of contrast, which goes deeper still to the root of the matter, and that is the candour of the Bible, which sets forth for us the weaknesses and failings, as well as the virtues and noblenesses, of the saints of old. How plainly are we told of the shortcomings in various guise of Noah and Abraham and Jacob, of Moses, of Eli, of David, and of many and subsequent kings of his race, and even of Elijah. Of what use would the history of Israel be to us in our struggles now if the figures were set before us like mediæval saints in some *Acta Sanctorum*? Yet the boastfulness of the Assyrian inscriptions is as prominent a fact as their cruelty. Vain to look there for any expression of regret for fault or mistake, any confession of disaster, any recognition of what would now be called a broad and liberal imperial policy. Victories are magnified, unsuccessful efforts are minimised, disasters are ignored, as is well exemplified by Sennacherib's silence as to the catastrophe which befell him on his Judæan campaign. Thus the demonstrated antecedents of the two witnesses must be steadily borne in mind in any comparison.

If now it is asked to what general results we are led by comparing the Bible story of the kings of Israel and Judah with the statement of the cuneiform inscriptions, we note in the first place that we are

met with a not inconsiderable amount of variation in chronology between the two. Of this we have spoken at some length, and we would only repeat here that we are not yet in a position to rule absolutely as to what is the true solution. It is conceivable that there are some errors in the numerals in the Bible account; it is conceivable, too, that fresh Assyrian discoveries may modify the results already obtained; or it may be that a fuller knowledge will put a new colour on the Bible story, such as for example to justify us in assuming the existence of co-regnant monarchs besides Uzziah and Jotham.

We cannot help thinking that many scholars now are too eager to put themselves in the position of the Roman father in Horace with his advice to his son—"Quocunque modo rem." "Put forward some solution" is their cry, and yet, in not a few cases, a solution, save as a mere shot at a venture, is, in the present state of our knowledge, unattainable. We prefer to say, Let us keep our judgment in abeyance and wait.

On turning from the chronology to the history generally, we meet with a very different result. We must indeed remember the totally different aim and the totally different character of the two sets of records; but, due regard being had to this, it is no exaggeration to say that the Assyrian inscriptions have yielded a most striking confirmation of the Bible story; they have shewn the connection of events which at times was not always evident; they have

filled up gaps, and so given a greater coherence to the story; they have in some cases cleared up difficulties where aforetime the Bible was accused of inaccuracy.

It is partly with the view of developing this thought that the present essay has been written. If it is true that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," and that in the history of Israel may be traced the growing development of God's purpose, put on record for us that we may study that purpose, then it becomes an imperative duty to study it in the fullest light that is obtainable. It surely is self-evident that, if the Bible record is a Divinely appointed gift, then, whatever view we take of the human casket in which the jewel is enshrined, the working out of the Divine purpose will be all the more clearly seen, the more that fresh evidence is brought to bear.

For the details of the Assyrian inscriptions, I have been mainly indebted, it almost goes without saying, to that mine for many students, Dr. Eberhard Schrader's great work *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*.\* Assyriology, it need not be said, is a rapidly growing science, and it can hardly be doubted that the next generation will be privileged to see a vast advance in our knowledge all along the line.

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\* This has been used in Professor Whitehouse's English translation of the second enlarged German edition. The pages cited in the following essay are those of the English edition, not those of the German edition noted in its margin.



For the special purpose in view, few periods could be chosen so full of suggestiveness. There are some epochs in the history of Israel when it must have seemed, humanly speaking, as if the fate of the dynasty, and sometimes even that of the nation, hung on a thread. Put the idea of an ever-watching Providence out of the matter, and how hopeless must have seemed the chance of the house of David, when only a babe of a year old remained, as against the strong-handed and unscrupulous Athaliah. Again, put the thought of Providence away, and how poor must the chance have seemed for the survival of the nation when the demand of Sennacherib for the surrender of Jerusalem was defied. Truly God fulfils Himself in many ways.

Even had the story of Hezekiah been simply that of some warlike chieftain, fighting desperately, even while apparently hopelessly, it would have been a marvellously enthralling one. How full of the intensest human pathos are such stories as those of Hereward, or William the Silent, or Hofer. Yet in Hezekiah and his city, around which such myriad memories circle, we have all this and infinitely more. We see across the long line of centuries an element of the Divine work in clearest manifestation, the faithfulness and omnipotence of God unmistakeably shewn.

We could have wished that the portraiture of Hezekiah stood out more plainly in individual charac-

teristics. We have called attention elsewhere to the difference between the Books of Samuel and Kings in the matter of biography; but though the latter is in no sense, save for Elijah and Elisha, a living portrait gallery like the former, yet there is no lack of definiteness in what is, after all, of the supremest importance—the presence of the Divine hand shaping the course of history.

It may be well to state here in a general way the materials on which we must rely for the period we are considering.

A. The historical Books of the Old Testament:

2 Kings 18–20.

2 Chron. 29–32.

Isaiah 36–38.

As we have explained, the histories of Kings and Chronicles treat the matter with such different purposes, that there is much in each which is not found in the other. The chapters of Isaiah, however, cited above, do not materially differ from the account in the Kings, the “writing of Hezekiah” being the chief thing peculiar to the former.

B. The prophetical and poetical Books of the Old Testament:

For the condition of the period immediately preceding the reign of Hezekiah, an abundance of light may be got from the prophecies of Amos and Hosea. The latter is indeed said (Hos. 1. 1) to prophesy in the reign of Hezekiah, but it is clear that it can only have been at the beginning of it, if for no other reason than that the fall of Samaria, which took place in the sixth year of Hezekiah, is not referred to. For the reign of Hezekiah itself, we have the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah.

Of course to those who accept the theory of a deutero-Isaiah and a trito-Isaiah, the word “Isaiah” will need defining. We venture to hope that our Appendix will



not be without its use, in which we have sought to shew in a broad general way on what grounds educated Christian men and women may still hold that the Book of Isaiah is one and undivided.

The Psalms which probably refer to our period are 46, 47, 48, 76.

c. Literary sources external to the Bible :

Josephus, *Ant.* ix. 13—x. 2.

Herodotus, ii. 141; which Josephus himself refers to.

Eccles. 48. 17—25.

d. Testimony of the Assyrian monuments :

Of these what we are mainly concerned with are the inscriptions of Sennacherib, and especially that of the Taylor Cylinder, detailing the events of the Phœnician, Philistine, and Judæan campaigns. This account we have cited at length from the rendering of Dr. Schrader.

In conclusion, I would wish to say that one class of readers has been specially before my mind in writing the following pages; I mean those readers who, without making any pretensions to Hebrew scholarship, are still keenly interested in all that concerns the Hebrew Scriptures; and who, while profoundly believing that the writings of the Old Testament are the Divine oracles, yet desire to avail themselves of all fresh light thereon as it arises, that they confuse not passing views of the Truth with that which is the Truth indeed.

R. S.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*August 24, 1897.*



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# HEZEKIAH AND HIS AGE.



## CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—REIGNS OF UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AHAZ.

THE most critical period through which the Davidic dynasty, in its rule over the kingdom of Judah, ever passed, was when the only surviving male of the line was a baby in arms, and a resolute strong-handed woman of an alien race, and a votary of Baal, seemed to have absorbed all power into her own hands. Yet the source of the whole evil was not far to seek. The ill-starred marriage of a son of the God-fearing Jehoshaphat with a daughter of the idolatrous Ahab and Jezebel—a daughter in whom we can trace her unflinching and unscrupulous mother much more than her weak and vacillating father—wrought mischief which it took generations to undo. Jehu's crusade against Baal-worship was purely destructive, and neither the religious nor the political position of kings like Asa and Jehoshaphat could be regained all at once. Although the patriotic intervention of Jehoiada rescued the dynasty, and not the dynasty only, but the nation, still it was long before the old footing could be regained. Two successive kings of Judah, Joash and Amaziah, were assassinated by their servants; but this did not lead, as in the Northern Kingdom, to the establishment of a new dynasty,

for in each case the son of the murdered king succeeded to the throne ; and in the former case it is expressly stated that the new king slew those who had conspired against his father ; while in the latter case, that of Uzziah, we are told that "all the people of Judah " took him and made him king. Both of these facts point unmistakeably to the firm hold which the House of David had recovered over the hearts and loyalty of the people.

With the age of Uzziah a new state of things is seen. He waged successful wars against various powerful foes. He won back the port of Elath from the Edomites, whence Solomon's fleet of merchantmen had traded to Ophir, and where Jehoshaphat had made an ineffectual attempt to do the like. Uzziah, to whom so large a share of material prosperity was given, doubtless did not fortify so important a depôt without making good use of it. The Book of Chronicles tells us further of successful wars against Arabians in the south, and of the submission, even if there were no war, of the fierce border-nation of the Ammonites on the east. There is, moreover, very good ground for believing that the Moabites, too, had been tributary to Uzziah. Besides all this, the power of the Philistines on the west was broken, the fortifications of three of their strongest towns, Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod, being rased, and Jewish fortresses built in their country. The Chronicler adds that Uzziah's army amounted to a force of 307,500 men, led by 2,600 officers ; and we can clearly see that under his rule the external prosperity of the kingdom reached a pitch it had not attained since the disruption of the Northern tribes.

Thus far the Bible story—but as it is too much the fashion to depreciate the evidence of the Book of Chronicles, not as overpowered by weightier evidence, but as inconveniently conflicting with this or that theory, we will briefly mention a detail taken from a different source, to which we shall subse-

quently refer. It will be remembered that in the story in the Book of Kings, whatever cause there be for the variation, Uzziah is generally called Azariah. Now in the cuneiform inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser, of whom we must again speak, occurs a mention of Az-ri-ja-hu Ja-u-da-ai, that is, Azariah the Judæan. We waive the chronological difficulty for the present, for of this we must speak by-and-bye, and assume that in the Azrijahu of the inscriptions we have the Azariah of the Bible. Now Tiglath-pileser in the fifth year of his reign attacked Hamath, and in due course took it, and in Assyrian fashion deported its inhabitants elsewhere. Reference is there made to Azariah, that is, if the identification is well founded. On the more perfect tablet it is said that Hamath and other towns "in their faithlessness revolted to Azrijahu."\* On the other tablet, which is very imperfect, there may be a reference to Azrijahu as a tributary.† This last point is somewhat doubtful, and may even be a piece of empty brag. Anyhow, the striking fact remains that while the Assyrians chastised Hamath, as we have said, there is no similar statement about Azariah (Uzziah). Presumably his power was too strongly established to be needlessly meddled with. Moreover, in the long list of the princes who did homage to the great king in the following year, there is no mention of Uzziah, though we meet with the familiar names of Menahem of Samaria, and Rezin of Damascus. The only conclusion possible is obvious.

Like a wise general, Uzziah looked carefully to his defences. The fortifications of Jerusalem were strengthened by towers at various points and by mechanical appliances "invented by cunning men," and great store of weapons offensive and defensive were laid up for the army. Yet he was no mere soldier; "he loved husbandry" we are told, and did much

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\* Schrader, I. 212.

† *Id.*, 210.

to advance it ; wells were dug, towers built, vineyards tended. All his prosperity seemed assured ; God had prospered him in all things, till his heart was lifted up to transgress God's law. He sought to assume the priestly duty of burning incense in the Holy Place, and while he strove with the priests who withstood him, God smote him, then at the height of his power and fame, with leprosy, thus compelling him to cease from all exercise of royalty, and all association with others, and even from entry into the Temple. Accordingly his son Jotham acted as regent in his stead.

Besides the regal power, there are three other factors entering into the national life, to which we must briefly refer. The relative power of the priesthood to the throne, seems now to have perceptibly increased on that of older times ; doubtless the successful revolution brought about by Jehoiada may have led worldly and ambitious members of the priestly order to magnify unduly the claims of their office, and to become too much a self-seeking faction rather than true ministers of the Sanctuary.

Again, the prophets seem now to take a larger share in moulding the nation than heretofore. Gradually and indirectly and with but imperfect recognition of what their work was to do for Israel, these holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, brought the nation nearer and nearer to the realization of God's ancient and perpetual purpose, the vision of the theocratic king, the anointed heir of David's throne. But the earlier prophets, even Elijah and Elisha, left no written record behind them. In or about the time of Uzziah comes the change ; a more tangible and abiding form of teaching was required. The earliest of the prophets whose writings we possess is, we believe, Joel, who probably may be assigned to the reign of Joash ; but Amos certainly prophesied in the reign of Uzziah, with Hosea



apparently somewhat later, and Micah later still. The prophetic career of Isaiah mainly falls in the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. A comparison of these records pictures as in a mirror the religious and social and political life of Israel in the 8th century B.C.

It is true that Amos and Hosea mainly address themselves to the Northern Kingdom, but it is clear that whatever the difference may have been in the two kingdoms, it was one of degree only. It is true that the kingdom of Judah was strong in the possession of a dynasty which held together the loyalty of the people, and of a central shrine at which Jehovah was worshipped, whereas no such dynastic or religious tie served as the life-blood of Israel; still both the allusions of the prophets and the direct statements of the historians shew that evil was everywhere. The priests are denounced in such language as was used by Wyclif or Luther of the corrupt priesthood of their day; the prophets to whom God had given the gift of utterance, to be used for His glory and the benefit of His people, prostituted the gift as a thing to be sold to the best bidder, regardless of what error their teaching might bring with it.

There remained the princes, the great nobles, the obvious and natural check on the corruptions of the throne, while at the same time the steadfast defenders of its rights. Yet Hosea and Amos do but paint for us a corrupt and oppressive plutocracy, luxurious as Romans of the Lower Empire, grasping and cruel as mediæval German barons, equally devoid of patriotism, manly honour, or the fear of God. Clearly, whatever brighter gleams there may have been, the picture of the class as a whole is black. The best hopes of the nation plainly lay in the personality of the king himself, and of his chief advisers, themselves, as a rule, and almost from the nature of the case, prophets.

We return to Uzziah. How long his life of seclusion as a leper lasted we cannot say, nor whether we are meant to include in Jotham's "reign" of sixteen years his regency as well as his reign. The Biblical chronology, and that of the inscriptions, seem hopelessly discordant here, and perhaps it is best to assume that Jotham's reign as actual king was very short. Not improbably he died in the year after his father, in which case the various things recorded of him in the Chronicles must be referred to his regency. He waged a successful campaign against the Ammonites, and indulged largely in building schemes, both on the Temple and the fortifications of Jerusalem, as well as cities in the mountains of Judah, and "castles and towers" in the forests. The reigns of the father and son may, in their essential features, be considered as one. Strong, wise, and successful kings, they sustained the glory of their nation, though beneath the surface lay evils, which two reforming kings, the second more thorough even than the first, could curb but not eradicate.

Towards the end of Jotham's reign, dark clouds began to shew themselves on the horizon; the alliance of Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria was to work disaster to Judah, but ruin to themselves. It needed but the presence on the throne of Judah of a weak and foolish king to bring the disaster to a head. Humble obedience to the command of God, through His prophet, would have carried the nation through the trouble; a bold and resolute resistance with suitable allies might have delayed it. Ahaz took neither course, he called in the help of Assyria. We shall briefly sketch in a subsequent chapter the occasions of contact of the great empire with Israel and Judah, here it is sufficient to say that, save for the very suspicious reference to Uzziah as a tributary, we have in the action of Ahaz, the first direct association of Assyria and Judah.

Ahaz had to face the hostile alliance of Samaria and Damascus, which seems to have been formed towards the end of his father's reign,\* but this attack, at any rate in the amount of success it achieved, is distinctly referred by Scripture to his apostasy from the God of his fathers. He revived the worship of Baal, and offered, perhaps as a desperate expedient to avert the impending storm, his children to Moloch, seeking, in the extremity of his need, the help of wizards and necromancers, though Isaiah, the prophet of Jehovah, stood by to guide him aright.

The peril was imminent, the troops of Pekah slew his people with very great slaughter, and 200,000 captives with spoil in abundance were carried off to Samaria, though restored to liberty in obedience to the indignant protest of the prophet Oded. The troops of Rezin, moreover, had been busy in the South and regained Elath, which was now reoccupied by the Edomites.† These last, seizing the opportunity when their enemy was distressed, had made raids on Judah and carried off captives, while the Philistines had seized numerous cities in the low country (Shephelah), and in the south country (Negeb), and occupied them. "The LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz, king of Israel" (2 Chron. 28. 19). But the two chief allies had deeper projects than merely of ravaging. They clearly meant to get rid of the house of David and dismember the kingdom. They moved their forces towards Jerusalem, but failed to capture it. At this moment of extreme need,

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\* See 2 Kings 15. 30, 37. We offer no attempt to explain the "twentieth" year of Jotham, who (v. 33) reigned but sixteen years. The solution suggested that the date is really the fourth year of Ahaz is at variance with 2 Kings 17. 1.

† In 2 Kings 16. 6 we can have little doubt that the reading *Edomites*, which is that of the *Kri*, or traditional Hebrew text, supported by LXX. and Vulgate, is to be preferred to the reading "Syrians" (A.V. and R.V.). The difference between the two words in Hebrew is infinitesimal. If the reading "Edomites" be accepted, it is probable that we should read in the first clause "restored Elath to Edom."

when the hearts of Ahaz and of his people were shaken like trees before the wind, comes the message of God by Isaiah, "Fear not," and the promise that spite of the plans of Syria and Israel,\* the confederacy should come to naught.

Ahaz, with the obstinacy that so often accompanies weakness, is unmoved by Isaiah's advice, and, in either real or affected dread, refuses to ask for a sign from God which should confirm Isaiah's declaration. Still the sign is given, the sign of the Virgin who should conceive and bear Immanu-El, God with us. Who the virgin was whom the prophet in the first instance had in his mind, we cannot say, or how far the prophet himself pictured the fuller Immanu-El, of whom the child then to be born was a foreshadowing. The sign itself in its primary meaning is simple enough. Before that child, who in due course will be born, shall emerge from babyhood, the two enemies before whom you are now trembling shall be destroyed by a mightier foe.

Ahaz, deaf to advice, takes the fatal plunge and appeals for aid, as a vassal to an overlord, to Tiglath-pileser: "I am thy servant and thy son." Needless to say, vassalage to an Assyrian king implied the payment of tribute, and Ahaz

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\* The E.V. hardly does justice to the Hebrew in the "let us make a breach therein for us." Rather is it "let us cut it up for ourselves," partition it, in fact. The new king appointed by the allies was to be one Ben-Tabaal, who is generally held to be a Syrian soldier, and the *form* of the name may give some colour to this. Yet let it be noted that the name occurs in a prophetic declaration of Isaiah, not in an historic statement. This would seem to give some special significance to the name. Now on the general view of the probabilities of the case, it hardly seems likely that Pekah, or even the pair of allies, would have set up a new king, who might have been disposed, when in possession of so strong a fortress as Jerusalem, to make himself independent of those who appointed him. What would be likely, *à priori*, would be that Pekah would seek to make himself king of the whole of Israel, shifting his capital from Samaria to Jerusalem, while the Syrians helped themselves elsewhere. Now a view anciently held was that Tabaal was merely a cryptogram representing Remaliah, so that the son of Tabaal is simply Pekah himself. An undoubted case of a cryptogram in the Bible, though not by the same method as the above, is the Sheshach (= Babel) in Jer. 25. 26; 51. 41.



had to strip the Temple and the king's house of the treasures stored up therein. Thus immediate deliverance was effected, but Ahaz had thereby made Judah to be a vassal state in the Assyrian Empire. The Bible tells us part of the outcome of the story in a few curt words, "The king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir and slew Rezin" (2 Kings 16. 9), and, apparently as an unconnected fact, that Tiglath-pileser ravaged the dominions of Israel in the north and beyond the Jordan, and carried off the inhabitants to Assyria (2 Kings 15. 29).

Now, in the annals of Tiglath-pileser, the notice of the eleventh year of this king speaks of a campaign against Philistia, and clearly this campaign included Israel. The tablet, though mutilated, seems to speak of Gilead and Abel-Beth-Maachah (cf. 2 Kings 15. 29), and then follows "the land Bit-Khumri (= Beth-Omri, the ordinary name for Israel in the cuneiform inscriptions) the distant . . . the whole of its inhabitants together with their property I deported to Assyria, Pekah their king I slew, Hoshea I appointed to rule over them."\* This clearly shews that the campaign of this year was mainly directed against Pekah. Further, the tablets assign the campaigns of the two following years to the subjugation of Damascus, after which we read of a number of princes doing homage and paying tribute to the great king, including Jehoahaz (Ja-u-hazi) of Judah,† who is thus recognizing Assyrian supremacy as the price for help against Israel and Syria. The Bible does, indeed, speak of Pekah as slain in a conspiracy headed by Hoshea, but this clearly means, when read in the light of the inscriptions, that Hoshea was at the head of a pro-Assyrian faction and owed his king-

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\* Schrader, I. 247.

† Of course there can be no doubt that by Jehoahaz we must understand the Ahaz of the Bible. The latter name may have been a convenient abbreviation, and possibly the prefix of the sacred name may have been removed intentionally.

ship to his submission to Assyria. Some remarks on this hopeless chronological puzzle must be deferred to a following chapter.

The help of the great king has been sought for and obtained, and the vassal goes to Damascus to render homage to his sovereign. Then, for the first time in history, the Davidic king, he who might have been a faint foreshadowing of the Christ yet to be, stands face to face with the king who is the embodiment of the world's brute force, of a power which far above all the great powers of history was founded in bloodshed. A further result of the visit to Damascus was the introduction into Jerusalem of a foreign altar, of which a pattern was sent by Ahaz to Urijah the priest, and by him built according to the pattern. To this apostate priest, the apostate king gives the order that the morning and evening sacrifices and oblations are to be offered on this altar, and the old altar of the Lord which Solomon had set up is moved out of its place and used but as a means "to enquire by." Probably, too, we may see a reference to a work of Ahaz in the account of the abominations which Josiah put away. "He took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, . . . and burnt the chariots of the sun with fire."\* Of course these may have been set up by Manasseh, but the following verse gives much colour to the idea that this was an importation by Ahaz on his visit to Damascus—"the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz . . . did the king beat down." The horses of the sun and the altars on the roof point unmistakeably to the worship of the heavenly bodies, which entered so largely into the religion of the Assyrians and Babylonians. We can hardly doubt that from the same source was derived "the sun dial of Ahaz," on

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\* 2 Kings 23. 11.

which the sign was manifested of God's promise to Hezekiah in his sickness. The Assyrian advance in science must have been as marvellous to the mind of this vassal king of a narrow realm, as their material forces were overwhelming.

All these allusions bring Ahaz very plainly before us. A rebel against his God, seeking for help in the gods and magic of the heathen, an idolater, yet not a fierce persecutor like his grandson Manassch, devoid of strength of will to grapple with fate, he closed his eyes to the plainest teaching of God's prophet, and had not God raised up a successor cast in a different mould, the nation must, humanly speaking, have drifted to its doom within another generation, and been absorbed amid foreign surroundings, like Samaria. That, spite of all that had characterized the sixteen years of Ahaz's reign, the scene could have been so completely changed under Hezekiah, reminds us that God did not cast off His people, whom He foreknew. If the nation was to survive as a nation the fiery crucible of the Babylonian captivity, more than one king was necessary to re-invigorate the nation with fresh life in the true faith and fear of God. The rule of Hezekiah and Josiah, in spite of all the apostasy of the kings who came after them, was the divinely appointed means for the abiding life of a true spiritual Israel.

## CHAPTER II.

## CHRONOLOGY.

IT will be observed that in the foregoing chapter we have studiously abstained from giving a single date. The chronological puzzle is so great in the period we are now considering, that we preferred to put the broad facts of the case in a general way rather than give the current dates without comment or add a detailed note wherever the date may be open to doubt.

It will be remembered that, besides the dates given in the Bible, we have also those from the Assyrian monuments, and, as things at present stand, it seems impossible to reconcile the two series, though for certain events, such as the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., they coincide.

We shall speak first of the Biblical system, as set forth in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, for the period from the Disruption to the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

Throughout this period, by a kind of system of double-entry as it were, each king of both kingdoms is introduced by the well-known formula, fixing the date of his accession relatively to the reign of the contemporaneous monarch of the other kingdom, with the length of his subsequent reign. It is thus minutely elaborated, and it is necessary to cause as little disarrangement as possible. A certain amount of modification must be conceded, yet it is important to note that if this be done, we still leave the synchronism; the relations of the two kingdoms with Assyria and with other nations would be unaffected.



It must be allowed, in the first place, that the Biblical reckoning is not altogether consistent with itself. Since the length of the reign of each king in both kingdoms is given, the total reckoning from the Disruption to the fall of Samaria should give the same for both kingdoms. Yet, if we reckon by the kings of Judah we get a total of 255 years, if by that of Israel only 241 years. We might reconcile the two by supposing interregna in the Northern Kingdom after the reign of Jeroboam II. and Pekah. In the absence, however, of any direct Biblical evidence for this view, we prefer to believe that there were periods of associated sovereignty in the kingdom of Judah, in which the period reigned conjointly is assigned to both kings. Thus Jotham was regent for his father Uzziah, and there can be little doubt that the regency is included in the reckoning of his reign.

We will take a couple of instances to shew that some change is necessary in the dates of the period now before us. In 2 Kings 15. 1, we are told that Azariah (Uzziah) began to reign in the 27th year of Jeroboam II. But Jeroboam reigned for 41 years (2 Kings 14. 23), and therefore he died in the 14th year of Uzziah. Yet Zechariah the son of Jeroboam did not come to the throne till the 38th year of Uzziah, though 2 Kings 14. 29 would lead us to suppose he succeeded in due course.

Hoshea is said (2 Kings 15. 30) to have come to the throne in the 20th year of Jotham. Yet Jotham is said only to have reigned 16 years (*v.* 33). One example more may suffice. Hoshea slew his predecessor in the reign of Jotham, yet his accession is referred to the 12th year of Ahaz (2 Kings 17. 1).

What the true explanation of these and the like difficulties is, it is hard, if not impossible, to say, and it is much better not to indulge in premature theorizings. We can well believe

that God, in preserving for us the records of His chosen nation, not as a means of satisfying historical investigation, but to shew the gradual working out of His purpose, allowed the human element to shew its fallibility in these minor details, so that we have errors of fact in points not affecting the main issue.

When we compare the Hebrew and the Assyrian records what we find may be broadly put thus. The latter, it is true, add a multiplicity of details which fill in the picture, but in their general historic outline strikingly confirm the Bible story, as we shall shew in a later chapter. Yet as regards the dates, we must allow at once that the two systems cannot be brought to coincide.

It will be well therefore before proceeding any further to give a slight sketch of the manner in which the Assyrian Chronology has been built up. Among the Assyrian tablets in the British Museum are several containing lists of officers, each appointed for one year, and giving his name to the year, like the ἀρχων ἐπώνυμος at Athens. These lists were therefore appropriately called by the late Mr. George Smith the *Eponym Canon*. A definite order is preserved, the first name in each cycle being usually that of the sovereign (*sarru*), with a dividing line marking off the preceding reign. Next to him came the commander-in-chief (*tartanu*), and so on. When the cycle had run its course, they began anew. Dates then were fixed among the Assyrians, not by reckoning from a fixed date, such as the accession of the reigning monarch, but by naming the person who was *eponym* for the year. These lists meet us in two forms:—the one, currently known as “canon of rulers,” of which four copies are known, supplementing each other where defective, giving merely the list of officers, divided by lines according to reigns; the other, of which three copies are known, the so-called “List of

governors," adds very brief historical notes, usually of military expeditions.

Now it is clear that if these eponyms are continuous, we have the means of fixing in chronological order the course of Assyrian events, but we shall be unable to connect these events with our own chronology unless we can fix exactly the date of one eponym. This further fact is happily forthcoming. In the ninth year of the reign of Assur-danil, the eponym was Puril-Sagali of the city of Gozan, and the note is appended, "In the month Sivan the sun suffered an eclipse." There seems to be a well-nigh universal assent that this eclipse was one happening on 15th June, 763 B.C., and, assuming that this is so, and that the eponym lists are continuous, as, we believe, nearly all Assyriologists hold, then we have the absolute dates of one whole series of events.

To the question how far the results thus obtained clash with the dates of the Biblical chronology, it will be simplest to give the annexed table, based on that given by Dr. Schrader. In the left-hand column, the dates given are those of the limits of a king's reign as fixed by the Biblical chronology. In the right-hand column are events occurring in these reigns, with dates fixed by the monuments.

Period of Reign according to  
Biblical Chronology.

Ahab, 918—897.  
898, Ussher.

Jehu, 884—856.

Uzziah or  
Azariah, 809—758.  
810, Ussher.

Dates of Events in the several  
years according to the Monu-  
ments.

Battle of Karkar, 854, in the  
war between Shalmane-  
ser II. and Benhadad and  
Ahab.

Jehu pays tribute to Shal-  
maneser II. 842.

In 742, Uzziah is in alliance  
with Hamath.

Period of Reign according to  
Biblical Chronology.

Menahem, 771—761.

772, Ussher.

Pekah, 759—739.\*

Hoshea, 730\*—722 (721).

Hezekiah, 726—698.

Invasion by Sennacherib in  
14th year of Hezekiah, 713.

Manasseh, 698—643.

Dates of Events in the several  
years according to the Monu-  
ments.

In 738, Menahem pays tribute  
to Tiglath-pileser.

Pekah is overthrown by Tig-  
lath-pileser in 734.

Hoshea pays tribute to Tig-  
lath-pileser, whose death  
in 727 gives the latest  
possible date.

Fall of Samaria, 722.

Sennacherib invades Judah,  
701.

At some date between 681—  
673, Manasseh becomes  
tributary to Esarhaddon.

It will be seen that while in the earlier part of this list, the discrepancy is considerable, in the later part it occasionally becomes less, and the date of the fall of the Northern Kingdom is the same in both lists, and the two systems are harmonious for the reign of Manasseh.

There is, however, a considerable difference as regards the date of Sennacherib's invasion. What the true solution of the discrepancy may be, we do not venture to say. The theory that the eponym list had a break in it, no longer finds favour, we believe, with Assyriologists, though advanced by so distinguished a scholar as M. Oppert, who took the eclipse to be one occurring on 13th June, 809 B.C. Possibly further study of the two systems may in time clear up the difficulty. It may be that fuller knowledge will enable us to see some of the Biblical figures in a different light, others may be due to errors of ancient scribes. It is also

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\* This chasm in the dates has been referred to above.

possible that the fuller discoveries of cuneiform inscriptions, which we can hardly doubt will yet be made, will modify some of the results at present ordinarily accepted.

It must be remembered that Assyriological experts of the highest eminence are by no means unanimous as yet on certain points of importance, such as an invasion of Judah by Sargon; and such lack of unanimity is clear proof that on such points there is an insufficiency of data to obtain an undoubted conclusion. It would clearly be out of the question, in a work like the present, to enter upon any elaborate discussions as to various attempts at harmonizing the two systems of chronology. We shall content ourselves with subjoining part of Dr. Kamphausen's list of dates, which we take from Professor Whitehouse's appendix to his translation of Dr. Schrader's great work.\*

Uzziah or Azariah, 777—736.

Jotham as regent, 750—736.

Jotham as king, 736—735.

Ahaz, 735—715.

Pekah, 736—730 [736—734].

Hezekiah, 714—686 [726—697]. Hoshea, 730—722 [734—722].

Manasseh, 685—641 [697—641].

The dates affixed in square brackets are those suggested by Professor Whitehouse as substitutes for Dr. Kamphausen's own. It will be noticed that, by a not very convenient plan, Hezekiah and Manasseh are made to ascend the throne in the year subsequent to the death of their predecessor.†

A few further remarks are necessary. It is clearly our duty to make as little disarrangement as possible in the carefully wrought up Biblical system. Its very elaborateness, to say nothing more, must stay us from sacrificing

\* Vol. II., p. 321.

† In the Assyrian chronology, a king counted the years of his reign not from his actual accession, but from the beginning of the following year, the fragment of the preceding year being "the beginning of the reign."



it to artificial theories, even though some correction is necessary; though we repeat what we have already said, that probably an increase of knowledge may clear up certain difficulties and dispense with the need of much correction.

Let it be noticed, too, that the disturbances occur mainly in the cross references between the Judæan and Israelite kings, and that after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the chronological difficulty on the whole disappears. We will merely call attention, then, to Professor Whitehouse's divergence from Dr. Kamphausen in the reign of Hezekiah. He suggests that from 726—715, Hezekiah was conjoint king with his father, that we thus account for the foreign policy of Judah during the siege of Samaria; maintaining that Ahaz, as a faithful ally and vassal of Assyria, controlled the policy of Judah, and not till his death did Isaiah shape a contrary policy. If Hezekiah became sole king in 714 (715), then the Bible and the monuments would be in perfect accordance in giving 701 as the date of Sennacherib's invasion (2 Kings 18. 13).

The suggestion is a highly ingenious one, and it receives some support from the fact, that, after the fall of Samaria, the Bible chronology seems much less open to challenge. The point will come before us again when we come to speak of Sennacherib's invasion. At present all that can be said with safety is that all solutions are tentative, and it is hopeless to look for anything like certainty till further evidence is given us. We may have reasonable hope that it will come in due time. Till then, caution and patience must be the animating feeling of every Christian scholar.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE SURROUNDING NATIONS.

## I. Assyria.

IT will be well to devote a little space to the history and circumstances of the principal neighbours of the little Judæan kingdom, and so seek to understand the nature of the political forces capable of influencing it. Foremost among these was the imperial power of Assyria. In the earlier days of the Monarchy, in the reigns of David and Solomon and their immediate successors, the Bible gives no reference to this kingdom, and this is paralleled by a corresponding silence of the monuments. Clearly the Assyrian power had for the time fallen into comparative obscurity, thus rendering the extension of the Israelite empire possible, though long before this time not a few Assyrian monarchs exercised a wide-spread sway.

The home of the Assyrians was on the north of Babylonia, and followed roughly the line of the Euphrates and Tigris, with the mountains of Armenia and Media on the north and east. They were doubtless originally a colony from the Babylonians, and spoke the same language, and, with difference of detail, used the same cuneiform script. Both were sprung from inter-marriage between the Shemitic invaders of Babylonia and the non-Shemitic Accadians. In religion they were polytheists, and the names of their gods, Bel and Nebo and Merodach, are familiar to us from the Bible. Of their skill in architecture, the discoveries of Botta and Layard testify. They were a learned race, intensely superstitious, keenly set

upon war, and cruel to an appalling degree. The cry of Nahum against "the bloody city" receives its best commentary in the Assyrian inscriptions themselves.

There is no reference to Assyria in the Book of Kings till the reign of Menahem, but the monuments carry us further back. An inscription of Shalmaneser II. speaks of a war against twelve allied kings (854 B.C.) including Hadadezer (Benhadad II.) and Ahab, when the latter brought 10,000 men into the field.\* On the well-known Black Obelisk of the same Assyrian monarch, Jehu son of Omri† is depicted as doing homage and offering tribute. Indeed, Jehu's vassalage to Assyria throws light on 2 Kings 10. 32. As being a vassal, he is an ally of Assyria, and therefore a foe of Hazael. Equally does the fact that in or about 800 B.C. (Assyrian reckoning) Ramman-Nirari receives tribute from the Northern Kingdom, and wages war upon Damascus, explain how Jeroboam II. is able to win such important successes against Damascus (2 Kings 14. 28).‡ A striking change takes place in Assyrian policy in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III., who ascends the throne, according to the reckoning of Assyriologists, in 745 B.C. Under him we see for the first time in Assyrian campaigns something more than mere raiding on a gigantic scale, mere records of fighting and tribute and slaughter. In this warrior prince, who held sway from Media to the Mediterranean, we have what we may well call an imperial policy. There is little doubt that we must identify him with the Pul, to whom Menahem pays tribute (2 Kings 15. 19); but the arguments on this subject are outside our present purpose.

It seems desirable to give a brief résumé of the reign of

\* Schrader, I. 186.

† *Ibid.*, I. 201. This is in accordance with the favourite way of designating a member of a dynasty so that the successor of a celebrated founder of a dynasty is spoken of as his "son."

‡ *Ibid.*, I. 208.



Tiglath-pileser III., which lasted, on Assyrian reckoning, from 745-727 B.C. We should know his exploits in minuter detail were it not that a later king, Esar-haddon, had defaced many of his annalistic tablets, meaning to use them for his own purpose. Still some escaped, and some are still partially legible, and the results thus got correspond curiously to what we read in the Bible.

In his first year, after a victorious campaign against Chaldaea, he takes the title of "King of Shumir (Shinear) and Accad," that is, of Babylonia. Five years later (740 B.C.), after three years' siege of Arpad, we find a reference to an alliance between Hamath and Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah, but, as we have already said, it is noticeable that while the former city undergoes chastisement, its inhabitants suffering deportation, the Assyrians did not see fit to molest Judah. Again, in 738 B.C., when various Hittite and Aramaean princes, including Rezin of Damascus and Menahem of Samaria, offer tribute, there is no mention of tribute paid by Uzziah of Judah. Thus we see that Uzziah, as not offering tribute, must have felt himself strong enough, if combined with his neighbours, such as Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Edom, to face the Great King, who therefore let him alone, and this agrees with the Bible story as to the firmly established power of Uzziah.

Jotham appears not to have long survived his father, and Ahaz on his accession finds himself confronted with the hostile powers of Syria and Israel, and in his recklessness calls in the aid of the Great King. The campaign of 734 B.C., is directed against "Pilista," and clearly Israel is to be included, for the tablet, though mutilated, seems to refer to Gilead and Abel-beth-maachah (2 Kings 15. 29), and to "the land of Beth-omri, the distant, . . . the whole of its inhabitants with their property I carried away to Assyria ;

Pekah their king I slew, Hoshea I appointed to rule over them." In the following year, is the campaign against Damascus, which is overthrown, and its king Rezin killed; and a number of kings pay tribute to the suzerain, including Jehohaz (= Ahaz) of Judah, who thus incorporates his kingdom as a satrapy of the Assyrian Empire. In 731 B.C. Tiglath-pileser carries on a campaign against Merodach-baladan, and the remainder of his reign seems to have passed peaceably.

On his death in 727 B.C. Shalmaneser IV. succeeds, a king whose very existence as a different person from Sargon was not universally allowed a generation ago. Hoshea was of course a vassal of the Assyrian Empire, and doubtless owed his throne to Tiglath-pileser. On his neglect to pay tribute, Shalmaneser invaded Palestine, and Hoshea submitted for the time, but commenced a suicidal intrigue with Egypt. On the second arrival of an Assyrian army, Samaria was taken, after a three years' siege, and the inhabitants were deported to the east of the empire. Yet, though the campaign was begun by Shalmaneser, the final conquest was by his successor Sargon. It is true that the words of the Bible (2 Kings 17. 4-6) might seem to imply that the king who began the siege was the one who finished it, but they do not necessarily do so. The term "king of Assyria" is undefined, though indeed it is possible that the Biblical writer did not know of the change of king.

Of the earlier king Shalmaneser, as we have seen, little is known, but his successor looms broad in history. He probably was the founder of a new dynasty and therefore a military usurper, as he never styles himself the son of Shalmaneser. His reign lasted from 727-705 B.C. (Assyrian reckoning). In his first year was the fall of Samaria, and in the following year came the first campaign against Merodach-baladan, who was again attacked and defeated eleven years

later. In 720 B.C. was the campaign against So, king of Egypt, as the Bible calls him, of whom we shall speak later, and in 715 B.C. the Pharaoh paid tribute. In his 11th year (711 B.C.), Sargon besieged and captured Ashdod (Isa. 20. 1); but on the question whether with this was combined a campaign against Judah we must speak at length in a subsequent chapter. After defeating Merodach-baladan the second time, Sargon took the title of King of Babylon.

He was succeeded in 705 B.C. by his son Sennacherib. The campaigns of the reign begin by a fresh outbreak of Merodach-baladan, who is again quelled and is forced to flee. Then came the campaign against Judah and Egypt, if indeed there were not two campaigns, but this must be left for the present. The campaign, or the later, if there be two, took place, we cannot doubt, in 701 B.C.; after which, so strikingly checked by the hand of God, Sennacherib's warlike operations never take a westerly direction, although a good deal of activity was manifested against Babylon and against Elam. After Sennacherib's murder by two of his sons in 681 B.C., his son Esarhaddon ascended the throne, who though king of Assyria held his seat of government at Babylon, where Manasseh, the degenerate king of Judah, the son of the king who had been enabled to defy the whole force of the empire, was taken a captive in chains. With the further history of Assyria we have no concern here, and proceed to glance briefly at that of Babylon.

## II. Babylon.

In reading in the Bible of the relations of Israel with the great empire of Western Asia, we long find the whole foreground occupied with Assyria; and its conquering kings, Tiglath-pileser, Sargon, Sennacherib, Titanic figures of the past, loom large before us. Not till a later date is it that

it is not Assyria, but Babylon, that appears as the world power under Nebuchadnezzar. Thus insensibly the feeling grows in many minds to view the latter as a distinctly later power than the former, a mere satrapy, which, breaking loose from the Assyrian Empire, succeeded in crushing it, and rising, though for a comparatively short time, to a far higher pitch than that ever attained by the mother-empire.

Yet this is a totally wrong view of the relation of the two. Babylon itself was doubtless the mother-empire, from which the Assyrians went forth as colonists at a remote period. Subsequently the two existed side by side with varying relations, friendly or unfriendly, with sometimes one and sometimes the other predominant. Sargon, a Babylonish king, is said to have waged successful wars with the Hittites and the Syrians as early as 3800 B.C. Seventeen or eighteen hundred years later came Khammurabi,\* whom Dr. Hommel has now confidently identified with the Amraphel of the time of Abraham.

Babylonia consisted, in the first instance, of a number of small kingdoms gradually aggregated into an empire, from which Assyria broke loose. The Babylonians are spoken of as brave rather than warlike, while the Assyrians were essentially a nation of soldiers. Mr. Pinches remarks of the Babylonians that they "preferred learning to fighting," and by the arts of peace, her learning, her commercial prosperity, was Babylon pre-eminently known among the nations, and clearly a marked prestige attached to the ancient mother-city, spite of the smallness of her foreign conquests.

In the period with which we are now concerned, the Assyrian power was very distinctly in the ascendant. Tiglath-pileser in the first year of his reign (745 B.C., Assyrian reckoning) had

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\* *The Ancient Hebrew Tradition as illustrated by the Monuments*, pp. 107. 193: Eng. Trans.

invaded Chaldæa and styled himself "King of Shumir and Accad," *i.e.* Babylonia. It is in cuneiform inscriptions of this king's reign that we first come across the name of the famous Babylonian chief, Merodach-baladan (Marduk-abaliddina) mentioned in the Bible as sending an embassy to Hezekiah (2 Kings 20. 12; Isa. 39. 1). The inscriptions speak of him as the son of Jakin, the Bible as the son of Baladan. We may explain this with Canon Rawlinson, by supposing Jakin the father, and Baladan the name of a more remote ancestor, or assume with Dr. Schrader that Baladan was the actual father, and Jakin merely indicated the dynasty. Assuming that the references in the inscriptions to Merodach-baladan all point to the same person, we find him doing homage to Tiglath-pileser in 731 B.C. Ten years later, however, he succeeded in seizing Northern Chaldæa and Babylon, in the first year of Sargon, who was now king of Assyria; and though Sargon maintained a struggle against him, he had in the end to recognize him as king of Chaldæa. From Sargon's inscriptions we learn that wars were waged between the two kings, and that Sargon frequently overcame his foe.\* Presumably, however, the contest was somewhat indeterminate till the twelfth year of the reign of Merodach-baladan, when Sargon succeeded in dethroning and imprisoning his foe, and among the spoil he carried off to his own palace were tablets dated the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth years of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon.

The death of Sargon was Merodach-baladan's opportunity. How he managed to escape and regain his footing in Babylon we cannot say, but anyhow at the beginning of Sennacherib's reign he succeeded in expelling the Assyrian viceroy, and apparently, for the short space of six months, again making himself king. Then Sennacherib came against him, and, in

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\* Schrader, II. 24.



spite of the help of his Elamite allies, utterly routed him. Merodach-baladan fled to the marshes, and the spoil of Babylon and its daughter cities was at the mercy of the ruthless Assyrian.\* What befell Merodach-baladan we cannot say. According to Polyhistor, cited by Eusebius, he was put to death by the Assyrian viceroy; but anyhow he passes out of history, though his sons maintained the war against Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's son, and his grandsons against Assurbanipal, Sennacherib's grandson. He himself—if, that is, we assume the existence of but one person of the name—had been contemporaneous with four kings of Assyria.

His embassy to Hezekiah, to be spoken of hereafter, perhaps took place in the six months of his second reign (*i.e.* in 704 or 703 B.C.). The congratulations on Hezekiah's recovery, combined perhaps with a little scientific curiosity as to the "sign" which accompanied it, had of course a more practical side. Clearly Merodach-baladan sought for material aid from the king of Judah, and presumably from the neighbouring kingdoms, against Assyria. Unfortunately the promptitude and overwhelming strength of Sennacherib rendered his hopes futile. It is seldom that a personage in so remote a period of ancient history—known to us, save for the stray notice in the Bible and in Polyhistor, solely from the cuneiform inscriptions—presents so romantic an appearance, from his long and desperate warfare against the crushing weight of Assyria. Lenormant's essay, *Un patriote Babylonien du huitième siècle avant notre ère*, forms in its way a curious historic parallel to Kingsley's stirring record of our own Hereward.

Three years after the fall of Merodach-baladan, Sennacherib removed the viceroy of Babylon, and replaced him by his own son, and amid some varying fortunes Babylonia remained under the Assyrian rule for some years. Esarhaddon held

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\* For Sennacherib's account, see Schrader, II. 31.

his court in Babylon, the walls of which he rebuilt, and at his death one of his sons became king of Babylon, under his brother Asshur-bani-pal king of Assyria. Yet in little more than sixty years Assyria had fallen to rise no more, and, under Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon rose to a stupendous pitch of greatness, though a short-lived one.

It will be clearly seen that the true view of the nature of the relative position of Assyria and Babylonia is a matter of considerable importance in considering the relevance of Isaiah's words to Hezekiah after the visit of the Babylonian envoys.

### III. Egypt.

Since the foundation of the Israelite monarchy, Egypt had well-nigh ceased to be a factor in shaping the fortunes of the Israelite nation. The great empire, which once ruled as far as the Euphrates, which was overlord of Palestine and Syria, had gradually, by the constant drain of war, and by internal divisions, waned into a mere shadow of its former self, and in the place of powerful monarchs like Thothmes III. and Rameses II. came a line of monarchs, some of whom had considerable difficulty in defending their dominions against foreign invaders. Now and again a sovereign of exceptional energy crops up, but this could not save the empire in its steady decline. Shishak (the Sheshonk of the monuments) ravaged the Southern Kingdom and pillaged Jerusalem, but, no long time after, a successor, whom the Bible calls Zerah, is decisively routed by Asa.

A change for the time meets us in the rise of the twenty-fifth dynasty. The first of this line was Shabaka, whom the Bible calls So, and the Assyrian records Shab'-i. It would appear that Shabaka was of Ethiopian blood, though claiming

in some sense descent from the old royal line of Egypt. The task before him, after overthrowing the preceding dynasty, was to consolidate his authority at home, by reducing to subjection the petty kings who exercised a local rule in various parts of Egypt.

We learn from the Book of Kings that Hoshea, the last king of Israel, who held his throne by virtue of his vassalage to Assyria, had coquetted with Egypt, thinking to play off the one empire against the other. "He sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria"; in other words he refused to pay the tribute imposed upon him. It will be observed that nothing is said of any help proffered by Shabaka, who was indeed fully occupied in consolidating his strength at home. There could be but one end to such a defiance, and Samaria fell before the Assyrians finally and hopelessly. With what promises from Egypt Hoshea had been deluded we cannot say, but evidently the Assyrian monarch felt that a just *casus belli* had been afforded him, and in the year after the fall of Samaria (720 B.C.) Sargon led an army to invade Egypt, and at Raphia met the allied forces of Shabaka and of the king of Gaza. The allies were routed, Gaza was captured, and Egypt became vassal to Assyria. On Shabaka's death, his son Shabatak succeeded, whose attempt to throw off the Assyrian yoke was foiled by his defeat at Eltekeh, while he himself was overthrown and slain by a kinsman, Taharka, the Tirhakah of the Bible.

The title "king of Ethiopia," given in the Book of Kings to this last-named monarch, is of course a reference to his origin as a king of an Ethiopian dynasty; but he was as much the Pharaoh as any one could be just then; Ethiopia and Egypt, in fact, might for the time be viewed as one nation. Tirhakah's position was hopeful, but it was by no means



free from anxiety. He had, apparently, ground for thinking that the dynasty was firmly established at home, that Ethiopians and Egyptians were being satisfactorily welded into one nation, and that the general outlook justified him in interfering with outside politics. Moreover, he may have felt the wisdom of the principle of grasping his nettle firmly, lest, unless he took the initiative, he might be attacked at a disadvantage. For—and here was the essential point—he and Assyria now, save for the little mountain kingdom of Judah, are face to face. Except for her there is no longer, to use the phrase of the present day, a buffer-state; Damascus and Samaria are both blotted out of existence.

In this state of things it was clearly Tirhakah's interest to get such minor allies as Palestine and its neighbourhood could give him, such as the Phœnician and Philistine towns, but pre-eminently Judah, with its mountain-fortress of Jerusalem. In the event of a desperate war between Egypt and Assyria, such a stronghold would be of infinite importance. If Judah were allied with Egypt, it might not be wise for the Assyrian army to advance incautiously with this strong fortress held in their rear by well-wishers to their foe.

Of Hezekiah's negotiations, and of the attempt to form a confederacy against the Assyrians, we shall speak in a subsequent chapter, in connection with Sennacherib's invasion of Palestine. It will suffice to premise here that Sennacherib's promptitude broke the confederacy to pieces, Hezekiah was forced to humble himself, and Tirhakah was defeated by the Assyrians in a great pitched battle at Eltekeh. Tirhakah, after the battle, had apparently fallen back, leaving Hezekiah unaided to face the power and the wrath of the great king. It was at this juncture, when the world seemed to lie at the mercy of the Assyrians—when, had the world known it, all

her hopes of a higher, purer faith were centred in the mountain city of the little kingdom of Judah, that the God of Zion interposed for Zion's aid.

A few words may be devoted to the further movements of Tirhakah. Sennacherib, we know, never ventured again in so fatal a direction, but his son Esar-haddon invaded Egypt, and completely defeated Tirhakah, who fled south to Thebes, while Egypt was divided into twenty districts, under Assyrian suzerainty. The death of Esar-haddon brought Tirhakah once again on the scene, and marching to the north he seized Memphis, and overcame the Assyrian garrison, and once more became king of Egypt. It was all to no purpose; Asshur-bani-pal, Esar-haddon's son, came against him, penetrated as far south as Thebes, and reinstated the Assyrian régime. Ultimately, after varying fortunes, Tirhakah was forced back to Ethiopia and died there.

#### IV. Israel.

At the risk of a certain amount of repetition, it will be well to glance once again at the course of the events in the Northern Kingdom. If we look back to the time when Uzziah reigned in Jerusalem, we find a strong-handed warrior king, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king in Samaria. The record of his long reign of forty-one years is compressed into a very few verses, yet enough is told us to shew his prowess and his might: "he restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain," an approximation to the glories of Solomon's empire. It was, indeed, merely an external prosperity: the heart of the nation was rotten to the core. The contemporaneous prophets, Amos and Hosea, shew all too plainly what the social and religious life was. The picture they bring before us is grim indeed; gross licentiousness and drunkenness prevail, a base and cruel plutocracy crush down

their poorer brethren. Priest and prophet, judge and ruler, had no thought but of their own gain and pleasure. Hosea can see "no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land"; what he does find is "swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and adultery." The very basest immorality was bound up with the false religion as an integral part of it. Hosea uses no colourless euphemisms: harlotry and drunkenness were destroying the nation. Amos, too, in his homelier style, tells the same story: the doom for "the three and the four transgressions of Israel" is like the writing on the wall. Doubtless much that is found in these two prophets is applicable to Judah as well, but all allusions shew that the Northern Kingdom was doubly stained with guilt;—"Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend," and their doom speedily came.

We have seen that under Jeroboam there was at any rate external and material prosperity for Israel; doubtless, too, a strong-handed and stable government. Jeroboam was perhaps a vassal of Ramman-Nirari, king of Assyria, which accounts for his successes against Damascus. At any rate, "the land of Omri" is named among the tributaries of this king, at a time when not improbably Jeroboam was reigning over Israel; and the same inscription shews us Damascus as receiving very severe treatment from the Great King. Still, however this may be, the prosperity is an external one only. As with the whole course of the Northern Kingdom, so pre-eminently now, we are reading the story of a series of military dictatorships more or less successful, till some fresh adventurer murders his predecessor, and tries to found a fresh dynasty. Yet a dynasty of more than two kings is rare, and though Jeroboam died when Uzziah was king of Judah, and in the reign of Uzziah's great-grandson, Hezekiah, the Northern Kingdom came to an end, yet between those two dates five

distinct dynasties are represented. Those military dictatorships, ending constantly with an assassination and the establishment of a new line, are in the strongest contrast to the rule of the Southern Kingdom, where one dynasty rules throughout, and where, though two monarchs were murdered, their sons succeeded peaceably.

It is well to realize in this special point of view the different conditions of the two monarchies. In the one there is national life vigorously throbbing, there is loyalty to the sovereign permeating the nation, there is a definite patriotism to the country and the throne. There seems next to nothing of this in the Northern Kingdom; it is a camp, militarism, the rule of the successful soldiery. The history of Israel from the death of Jeroboam onward to the end shews this unusually plainly. Zechariah, the son of the strong-handed Jeroboam, the last of the line of Jehu, is murdered after six months by Shallum, presumably one of his captains, who reigns in his stead. Yet he, after reigning one month only, is in his turn killed by Menahem. Here for a time there is a little more permanence, for Menahem sat on the throne for ten years, and, after a reign of exceptional cruelty, apparently died a natural death. Yet his son Pekahiah, after a reign of two years, was slain by Pekah, one of his captains. As we have already remarked, the chronology at this point is exceedingly puzzling, but according to the Bible reckoning he reigned for twenty years. He and his ally the King of Damascus made war on Ahaz, who, faithless to his God and disobedient to His prophet's command, brought in against his foes the armies of the Great King. Damascus was destroyed, and Israel ravaged; and as for Pekah, on him it was but the old story repeated, "Hoshea the son of Elah conspired against him and slew him." With Hoshea the kingdom, whose history is one long record of blood, came to an end.

One element of stability was thus lacking to Israel, the want of a settled dynasty, strong in the people's affections, affections which not even the presence of unworthy kings from time to time could destroy. Loyalty to a throne, as an abiding principle, will make men submit to much, which under different conditions would not be tolerated for a day. The unworthy Charles II. of England was borne with, and even James II., till loyalty to the throne became disloyalty to England.

Again, Israel lacked the element of strength arising from the presence of a definite national religion, a national church : for however faulty numbers of men were in their allegiance, the worship of Jehovah was an element strongly tending to cohesion. It was a tie with the past, as well as a common bond in the present. There was one God claiming the allegiance of the nation, the God who had cared for Israel all the days of old. In place of this, what had Israel ? The impure worship of alien deities like Baal and Ashtoreth, the bloody rites of Moloch, were dominant. Apart from the religious side of the matter, one cannot but see that in a rabble of gods from diverse nationalities, such as we have here, was no element of national coherence.

Yet another point : the Northern Kingdom had changed, and changed yet again, its capital, finally resting in Samaria, a city with no ancient history behind it, a creation of Omri, brand new as a nineteenth century American town. Yet the line of David had clung, with never a break, to Jerusalem, ancient and venerable even when David became master of it, with a record going back through the centuries to days when Melchi-zedek, its priest-king, ruled there, in the name of God Most High. The prestige of Jerusalem, as well as its almost impregnable position, had much to do with the permanence of Judah's life.



With differences such as these, who can wonder that Judah endured shock after shock while Israel fell, and that even when her capital was rased to the ground, and her people deported to Babylon, the remnant should revive, returning once again to the sacred soil, with renewed life like that of the living germ again shooting forth when the oak is fallen ?

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE OUTLOOK AT HEZEKIAH'S ACCESSION.

LET us seek to picture to ourselves the political and social and religious outlook when the young king ascended the throne of his fathers. From every point of view, the prospect must have been full of gloom and disheartenment, alike to this young man of twenty or five and twenty,\* suddenly called upon to take the helm, and to his people.

And first, of the youth himself :—What might naturally be expected from a son of the weak and erring Ahaz, brought up amid the surroundings and in the atmosphere which must have pervaded the court ? On all inferences from heredity, we might have looked here for the *progeniem vitiosiore*m. Yet history has some strange surprises for us at times. Hezekiah's own son, the unhappy Manasseh, who filled Jerusalem from one end to another with the blood of the votaries of his father's God, is an even yet more startling phenomenon, if we consider the influences under which we must suppose him to have been shaped. Our own history of England is full of such surprises—

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\* It can hardly be doubted but that there is some error in the numerals in the Old Testament story. Ahaz was 20 years old at his accession, and reigned 16 years (2 Kings 16. 2 ; 2 Chron. 28. 1), so that he was 36 years old at his death. Thus, if Hezekiah were 25 years old at his accession (2 Kings 18. 2 ; 2 Chron. 29. 1), he must have been born when his father was 11 years of age, which seems incredible. It has been suggested that, in the former pair of references, the 20 should be altered into 25 (i.e. the Hebrew *Caph* altered into *Caph He*) ; or that in the latter pair the 25 should be altered into 20 (*Caph He* to *Caph*). The former view has in its favour the fact that 25 is actually read by one Hebrew MS. mentioned by De Rossi ; by some MSS. of the LXX. (not, however, by A or B), and by the Peshito Syriac.

the greatest of the Plantagenets, Edward I., the son of the feeble and vacillating Henry III.; or conversely, the gentle recluse Henry VI., the son of the hardy victor of Agincourt.

The beginning of Hezekiah's reign shewed what manner of man he was. No more paltering with idolatry, no truckling to the heathenism of his suzerain, entered into his thoughts. Whatever powerful backing the degrading idolatries of his father may have had at home, the impetuous will of a ruler who knew his own mind bore down all opposition. Whatever terror might fill some hearts at the thought of the wrath of the Great King, and of the punishment which no feeling of mercy ever tempered, which would surely fall on them, Hezekiah shewed a nobleness and a resolution which presaged well for the future.

Let us consider next what the political horizon must have suggested to Hezekiah and his advisers. On the one hand was Assyria, on the other Egypt. We have already sought to shew how the former must have been a name of terror at the time of Hezekiah's accession, in a way never dreamt of by an earlier generation. It has been seen how a new idea of imperial power had manifested itself in the person of Tiglath-pileser, and the whole state of things in Western Asia had undergone a revolution pregnant with menace to all neighbouring states. No longer do we see a number of states more or less on an equality, whereof now this and now that gains a temporary predominance above its neighbours. At length a great world power, of insatiate maw, seeking to crush all nations around by brute force into some sort of uniformity, looms upon the world. To the embodiment of this idea of empire, Abaz, in his frenzy of terror, had appealed for help, and, while obtaining the rescue he sought, had in so doing laid bare his own frontier defenceless to the Assyrian. Since that appeal, Shalmaneser and Sargon had continued the



policy of their predecessor; the extension of the empire still went on, the world beheld then, in a way it has certainly never seen since, the apotheosis of brute force, Procrustean in its methods, and bloodthirsty to a degree in its carrying out of them.

To this power the little mountain kingdom of Judah was a tributary. It might continue to pay the tribute demanded, purchasing perhaps thereby a respite, till some freak or fit of ill-will on the part of their suzerain should precipitate a catastrophe. It might, indeed, refuse to submit any longer to this degrading impost. But what a terrible risk was this, how certain and how awful the doom!

On the other side there was Egypt. It is true that the great military strength of Egypt had long departed. No more should such days be seen as when Thothmes III. led an Egyptian army to the very banks of the Euphrates. The country had now fallen into the hands of a number of rival petty kings, inviting foreign invasion by the lack of internal cohesion, putting an end for the time to any chance of Egyptian interference beyond the frontier. As we have said in an earlier chapter, a change comes upon the scene with the rise of the Ethiopian dynasty in the person of Shabaka, who, however, had too much to think of in putting down opposition to his supremacy at home to be desirous of burdening himself with obligations to his neighbours.

With this actual revival of a certain kind of unity, a recollection of the old glories of Egypt would occur to the minds of many in Jerusalem. They must often have looked longingly at the comparative security and settledness of Egypt, and would easily confound mere material prosperity with real national strength. We could readily believe, even were there no actual evidence, that a party in Jerusalem, chafing doubtless at Ahaz's surrender, might dwell on the thought that,

allied with Egypt, they might even defy the Great King ; unfortunately oblivious of the fact that, if war arose, it would be not on Egypt, but on Judah, that its first brunt would fall.

Such then were two alternatives for the young king : he might contentedly acquiesce in the position of vassal, following where his father had led, or he might hope to reverse what had been done by leaning on the strength of his southern neighbour.

A third possibility, too, now comes to the front. As long as Ahaz reigned, the pro-Assyrian party was clearly dominant ; after his death it seems to have passed into the background. Two rival parties did indeed strive for the mastery, that which urged the wisdom of leaning on Egypt, and what may be called the national party, headed by Isaiah, who bid his people trust in the promises of God rather than in the chariots of Egypt ; yet the once powerful Assyrian faction is no longer potent to sway the national counsels. What causes were at work which neutralised this policy so completely that we see no trace of it in Hezekiah's reign, it is impossible to say. How utterly the Assyrian party had died away in Jerusalem may well be seen from the fact that, a few years later, the Rab-Shakeh's speech to the Jews, spoken of set purpose in Hebrew, to be understood of the people, and not in Aramæan, called forth no response from those he aimed at. Then, if ever, would have been the chance of the Assyrian party to make a rally.

On the other hand, the Egyptian party must have been a strong one. The vehement appeals and denunciations of Isaiah shew this plainly. The leader, or anyhow one of the chief leaders, of this party, was apparently Shebna, the spelling of whose name suggests that he was a foreigner,\*

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\* The absence of any mention of his father's name also points this way.

and thus would be disposed to view the matter as one of ordinary practical politics, and not as one where the declared will of God directly entered. At what time the party headed by Shebna fell, so that we subsequently find him occupying an inferior office, we cannot say. Isaiah denounces the stranger who had ventured to hew out a sepulchre for himself in the rock, perhaps claiming thereby a semi-royal position, and declares that his office should revert to a worthier holder. From that time forwards, Isaiah evidently held undisputed lead in the royal council.

Yet at Hezekiah's accession, the contest of opposing advisers must have been strangely perplexing to the young king. He heard an astute adviser urge the wisdom of leaning on Egyptian chariots because they were many, and on Egyptian horsemen because they were strong, and picture in glowing terms the strength of Pharaoh and the shadow of his power. The glamour of the old glory of Egypt dazzled the eyes of many.

On the other hand, Isaiah stands forth as the champion of the truly national policy. One must infer that he was faced at first with a very general opposition from those on whom he might well have counted, for we read of the "scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem," and of the priest and prophet who "err in vision, who stumble in judgment."

By the mercy of God, Who willed not that His people should be blotted out in some conflict between Egypt and Assyria, the appeals of Isaiah prevailed, and at length he clearly became to all intents and purposes the prime minister of Hezekiah thenceforward to the king's death.

Yet picture the young king at first, with eager disputants seeking to sway him, ere yet perhaps his mind had taken its true bent. For aught that we can tell there may have sat

at the council board at first some of his father's old councillors. Doubtless there were. They would urge that it would be madness to displease Assyria; that the king, who could truly boast that he treated the world as one huge bird's nest, whence he gathered the eggs at will, was one whose supremacy might almost be viewed as a law of nature. Yet the young king, perhaps just because he is a patriot, and the remembrance of his vassal condition has stung him to the quick, is evidently biassed towards another group, who point to Egypt as the true counterpoise to Assyria, regardless of the fact that an alliance with Egypt would mean that in case of war Judah must come between the hammer and the anvil; that while the Egyptians would welcome them as taking off the pressure from themselves, naught can be looked for from them in return—"vain, and to no purpose is their help."

From both of these, doubtless after many waverings, Hezekiah turned to Isaiah, as he set forth the Divine promise, "in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Truly in the end God made good His word to His people.

So much for the political outlook; what shall we say of the religious prospect? what of the priesthood? The high-priest of Ahaz had shewn himself an apostate to the law of God in his desire to play the courtier. In such a crisis, and under such a ruler as Ahaz, a priesthood might have been true to their principles and their faith at any cost, or they might simply have swum with the stream. Yet the terrible invective of Isaiah (chap. 28) shews how utterly duty, and honour, and morality, had been cast away by the priests. Not Luther, as he lashed the vices of the monks, not Gavazzi, as he pictured the Papacy a generation ago, could have drawn a grimmer picture. Still, it does not appear that Hezekiah, amid his sweeping reforms, both destructive and constructive,

met with any resistance from the priesthood. Perhaps they were influenced by the thought that the line of the king's reforms would, in the long run, tend to enhance the dignity of their order. Yet how grievously must he have been hampered at first in his efforts by the lack of men who, like noble priests of the house of Aaron before him and after him, had been in the foremost rank of those battling for the right. How evident a disregard for God's laws as to idolatry had been tolerated, we shall better understand when we come to speak in detail of Hezekiah's work as a reformer.

Think next of the social side of things, and of the material prosperity of the country. Again we have a gloomy prospect; on one hand an empty treasury and a crushed and broken peasantry; on the other, so far as there remained a body of wealthy nobles, they were largely a luxurious and immoral caste. The cultivators of the land must have been slain and harried by the incursions of Pekah and Rezin, which must have inflicted a wound on the country, which years would be required to heal. Yet "what the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten"; the land thus exhausted has to bleed again through every pore to satisfy the greed of the Assyrian king. Ahaz had drained the treasures of the Temple and of the king's house to satisfy his suzerain; but with the country devastated, crops destroyed or carried off, cultivators massacred, or, if not, ruined, how were fresh supplies to be obtained for the exhausted treasury? Surely the heart of the nation must have been faint and despairing, and the fact that for the first time their king was a vassal must have sapped their self-respect.

Yet nations have ere this been as cruelly pressed as was Judah, against whom none could bring the taunt,—In this extremity of your fate, you still have nobles and rich men whom no national disaster will tear from their luxury. The



heroic Hollanders, who defied Alva and all the might of the sovereign of Spain and the Indies, may teach us that ; yet Israelite nobles of the time, as pictured in the contemporaneous prophets, appear as a body of men who, whatever bright exceptions there may have been, must have proved a terrible hindrance to any true reform.

Many a heart might well have quailed at such a prospect. The predominant feeling in the minds of many thoughtful men in Jerusalem must have been that of the callousness of despair. It was not the terrible blow to the national resources that touched the people most deeply. The means adopted to meet the original evil did but aggravate the injury to the national life. A crushing disaster may bring out all that is noblest in a people, as witness the striking manifestation in Rome after the battle of Cannæ ; but a disaster from which relief is sought by entering into a state of degrading vassalage can but still further demoralise those who seek such a remedy. Yet patient resolution and God's help in time wrought the cure.

Amid such grim circumstances then, a divided council-board, a cowed and dispirited people, an empty treasury, a corrupt judiciary, a luxurious and oppressive aristocracy, and a priesthood faithless to its trust, the young king, little more than a boy in years, ascended the throne of his fathers.

## CHAPTER V.

## HEZEKIAH THE REFORMER.

IT is well to distinguish, in dealing with religious reformation, between the slowly maturing forces that make for change, like mines spreading near a besieged fortress, and the effective cause which rouses these forces into sudden activity, the match which kindles the slumbering mine. Thus, in both Germany and England, in the Middle Ages, forces were gradually taking shape which must have resulted in some sweeping outcome, which, sooner or later, however guided for well or ill, must have swept away all attempt to quell them. The invention of printing must have vastly diminished the cost, and so increased the circulation of books; education suddenly advanced with vast strides, teachers and patrons of learning arose who were neither monks nor in sympathy with their ways, Erasmus and Reuchlin and Colet, and there was steadily growing an intelligent middle class, too wealthy and powerful not to be taken account of by their rulers, too educated to be absolutely the victims of the clergy of the day. How long the slow development would have gone on we cannot say. In Germany it was the vile traffic of Tetzl which aroused the fiery spirit of Luther; in England it was the unholy passion of Henry VIII. that began the breach with the Papacy. Any motive power, noble or ignoble, sufficed to put in action forces working mainly for good.

In the case of Hezekiah, while we can picture to ourselves the various forces which were at work at and before his

accession, we know definitely what it was which began the movement (or at any rate was the mainly exciting cause), and doubtless gave to it a force and intensity it might otherwise have lacked. It was the prophetic message of Micah the Morasthite, uttered "to all the people of Judah" and, it would seem, before Hezekiah. The fact comes before us incidentally in the story of Jeremiah, who, on Jehoiakim's accession, uttered his words of warning, and by his words so stung the unworthy priests and prophets that they clamoured for his death. More noble than these professed ministers of Jehovah were the princes and the people who forbad this, and the parallel instance is cited (Jer. 26. 18) of Micah, who spoke a message of doom, and so far was Hezekiah from putting him to death that it is asked "did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them?" If we are to take Micah's words (1. 8) as literally applying to himself during the delivery of this message, his appearance may well have startled the excitable Orientals he addressed—half naked, uttering a wild cry like the howl of the jackal or the dismal wail of the ostrich. His invective against prince and prophet and priest culminates in the threat "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the House as the high places of a forest." When, and in what degree, this prophecy was fulfilled, we do not here enquire; it is sufficient to observe the sudden and important effect produced.

For the reformation of Hezekiah, as for the rest of his history, we have, of course, the parallel accounts of Kings and Chronicles. Yet while these supplement each other, it would be a very false view to assume that the supplementary relation is the essential one. The former work is pre-eminently annals, a civil and military record, the latter mainly an ecclesiastical



history, with the idea of God's national church as the central thought throughout. Thus of the three chapters devoted to the reign of Hezekiah in Kings, only a few verses dwell on the reformation, the invasion of Sennacherib being the engrossing topic. In Chronicles, three out of four chapters dwell on the reformation, and condense the story of the invasion in the remaining chapter.

The denunciation of Micah was addressed to moral evil; the story of Chronicles deals with the externals of worship only; yet, the priesthood being what it then was, the neglect of the moral and of the ceremonial law would go hand in hand, and Hezekiah's reforms, as described by the Chronicler, may well be believed to be the external sign of the removal of other evils than a neglected or a false ritual. The impulse to reform must have come soon after his accession, for he commenced action "in the first year of his reign, in the first month," though this clearly does not mean in the first month of his reign, but in the Nisan of his first year. This is the natural meaning of the Hebrew phrase, and it is borne out by the celebration of the Passover in the second month, by virtue of a concession granted in the Law. Moreover, we could hardly fancy that the work began on the very day of Hezekiah's accession (2 Chron. 29. 17); the forces dominant in the reign of Ahaz could hardly have died out at once with his death.

The work naturally began with the Temple. Ahaz had pillaged the Temple to meet the rapacity of his suzerain; but this was of lesser moment, Hezekiah himself was subsequently forced to do the same. He had displaced the great altar, and put in its stead one after the pattern of a heathen altar he had seen at Damascus; and to the gods of Damascus, in despair of aid from Jehovah, he offered sacrifice. But above and beyond all this, he commenced a policy of injury and outrage to the Temple; he cut in pieces the vessels of the house of

God, and closed its doors, so that the priests who remained faithful could not enter, and thus the worship of Jehovah in His own sanctuary came to an end for the time. The insult to God must be remedied at once; the doors of the sanctuary were once more thrown open and repaired (or strengthened). In the light of the fact that on the occasion of Sennacherib's invasion Hezekiah "cut off the gold\* from the doors of the Temple of the LORD" (2 Kings 18. 16), we may assume that the renovation included this special adornment also. The clergy, priests and Levites, are summoned to receive the king's orders for the work specially devolving on them, the cleansing of the sacred precincts, they having first purified themselves from moral and ceremonial defilement according to the Law. He doubtless remembered the calamity which befell David's first attempt to bring the ark of God to its final resting place on Mount Zion, because the Levites had not previously sanctified themselves for their holy function of bearing it. Therefore, said David, "the LORD our God made a breach on us, because we sought Him not after the due order" (1 Chron. 15. 13). The command is given by the king to remove the "filthiness" out of the holy place, which obviously here means the whole of the sacred precincts, and to atone for the misdeeds of the generation who had neglected and desecrated it. The word translated "filthiness" doubtless includes the dirt which had accumulated in the Temple since it was shut up, but will also have special reference to the idol abominations wherewith God's House had been polluted. The work of purifying the outer courts fell to the Levites, who might not enter into the actual Temple; on the priests devolved the duty of cleansing the inner house. The whole work was concluded on the sixteenth day of the month, a fortnight from the day of its first

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\* It is true that "gold" is not actually specified in the Hebrew, but we can hardly fancy that the "overlaid" can have been of any less precious metal.

inception ; the Temple and its courts were purified, the altar too, and the table of shewbread, and the vessels which Ahaz in his transgression had cast aside. The priests and Levites, also, were once more ready to resume their interrupted functions. Yet one preparatory rite was still necessary : before the regular service could be resumed a sin-offering was necessary. The perfect unity between God and the nation had been broken through, the breach must be covered and atoned for before fellowship could be renewed. Accordingly, Hezekiah commands the offering of an unusually large sin-offering, consisting of seven of each of the four kinds of sacrificial animals, on behalf of the "kingdom," that is, the royal house, and the sanctuary, and the whole kingdom of Judah.

In the account of the actual offering of this sacrifice, an exceptional emphasis is laid on the words, twice occurring, "for all Israel" (2 Chron. 29. 24). In the light of the fact of Hezekiah's subsequent invitation to the Northern tribes, it is clear that Hezekiah has in view the re-uniting of Israel once again into a single religious community. The house of David may perhaps no more rule over the dissident tribes, yet there is no reason why all the tribes should not once more unite in the worship of the God of their fathers.

All is ready now for the resumption of the regular service, and Hezekiah, who throughout is pictured as the actual initiator of the whole reformation, gives the needful command to the Levites and priests to be ready with the instruments proper to their several orders, as David and the great prophets of his time appointed. The "burnt offering," the daily morning sacrifice, must now be offered, the expression of the complete dedication to God of those for whom it was offered, and again by the king's order the offering was "for *all* Israel." The priests with their trumpets and the Levites with harps and cymbals broke into melody till the burnt

offering was finished, that all around might realize that Israel had again turned to its God. Beside the actual sacrifices too, Hezekiah, who clearly represented a more cultured type than many kings of Judah, bid the Levites "sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer." In this command, the Chronicler associates the "princes" with the king. Although both before and after this time we find the "princes" associated with the party hostile to God (see *e.g.* 2 Chron. 24. 17, 18; Zeph. 1. 8), yet it may be that the terror-inspiring cry of Micah may have led a party of them to see the truth, and in the story of the Chronicler we find them associated throughout with Hezekiah in his reforms.

Everything can now go on as heretofore, and the king exhorts the congregation to offer their "sacrifices, thank offerings, and burnt offerings" as of old. So ready a response does he meet with, that the priests are all too few to discharge the duties incumbent on their office, and the Levites have to help them in matters in which they ordinarily had no share. Of course there were not only an exceptionally large number of sacrifices and offerings to demand their attention, but also an insufficient number of priests to meet this sudden need. Several allusions shew plainly that the priests returned only very gradually to their neglected duties (*e.g.* 2 Chron. 30. 3). The writer makes one very significant remark on this point, "The Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests" (2 Chron. 29. 34). We may perhaps suppose that Urijah the high priest, who had basely consented to Ahaz's apostasy and obeyed commands which he, as priest of Jehovah, should have been foremost to reject (2 Kings 16. 16), had been followed in his treachery by a number of leading priests. The Levites, a humbler class, would naturally be less amenable to court influences. A



parallel case might be afforded by the history of our own Church. It is too much the fashion to speak of the eighteenth century as a period when all life in the Church slumbered, and to brand the clergy of that date as worldly and indifferent. Yet whatever truth there may be in this as to dignitaries appointed to their posts from political or social reasons, we may be perfectly sure that thousands of humble parish priests served God and their own generation as devotedly as the noblest of any age.

The Temple was at length purified, and the worship of God re-established, and a wider range of persons might now be appealed to, to share in the good work. Hezekiah accordingly communicates not merely with his own people, but with all Israel. His motive was obvious, to restore a religious unity even where political unity had ceased. It might be asked how such dealings were possible with the subjects of another monarch, who might, it is suggested, resent such interference. Indeed some writers have gone so far as to postpone this action until after the taking of Samaria and the final fall of the Northern Kingdom, but we see absolutely no reason for accepting this view. The Book of Kings throws no light on the subject, and the narrative of Chronicles points conclusively to the invitation to the Passover being the immediate sequel to the initiatory services of which we have spoken. As to the difficulty arising from the idea of interference with the subjects of another king, it should be sufficient to point out that for some time before its fall the Northern Kingdom must have been in a state of chronic anarchy, and at the last two distinct parties, a pro-Assyrian and an anti-Assyrian, were in keenest opposition; Hoshea, the nominee of the former, being alike the murderer and successor of Pekah, who represented the opposite faction. Moreover, in some unexplained way, Hoshea had fallen into Assyrian hands

some time, apparently a considerable time, before the fall of Samaria ; and if he were not reigning, but lying an uncrowned monarch in an Assyrian prison, Hezekiah need have had no scruples. Indeed it is worth calling attention to the qualification with which the writer of Kings says that Hoshea did evil in God's sight, "but not as the kings of Israel that were before him" (2 Kings 17. 2). Jewish tradition has explained this to mean that he threw no obstacle in the way of his subjects who wished to worship at Jerusalem. Yet, even apart from Hoshea, we may feel sure that the difficulty is a fancied one. When a kingdom is in the throes of dissolution, foreign agents whose aim is a purely religious one are pretty sure to be left alone.

It will be noticed that of the ten tribes, no less than five are named as actually responding to the call, and they not merely the nearer tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Issachar, but the more distant Zebulun and Asher. The result was that not only the king's own subjects, but members of the Northern Kingdom were gathered in Jerusalem in very large numbers, "a very great congregation." The initial difficulty, that of the impossibility of keeping the Passover on its proper day, the fifteenth of Nisan, was happily overcome by a concession granted in the Law itself. The paschal lamb was ordered to be slain on the fourteenth of Nisan, and was eaten in the evening which began the fifteenth, but the cleansing of the Temple was not completed until the sixteenth (2 Chron. 29. 17). Fortunately, however, a loophole was provided by the Law. In the second year of the wanderings, a case arose of certain Israelites who were incapacitated from partaking of the Passover by having touched a dead man (Num. 9. 6), to whom Moses, by God's direct command, conceded the privilege of a supplementary Passover. The privilege was granted of holding the festival at the corre-

sponding time in the second month on the part of any Israelite who had become ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body, or who had been on a journey afar off. This concession to the individual, Hezekiah, with a wise breadth of view, feels can fitly be allowed to the community, and both the underlying reasons find here a place. The priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient numbers by the proper time, nor had the people gathered themselves at Jerusalem. Journeys of considerable length had to be undertaken in some cases.

The king's messengers, the "runners," traverse the whole land, appealing to the northern tribes to turn again to the God of their fathers, that He, too, might "return to the remnant that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria" (2 Chron. 30. 6). There is not the least necessity to see in this last phrase a reference to the fall of Samaria. Assyria had made its hand felt heavily at an earlier stage. Tiglath-pileser had already carried into captivity the whole of the tribes who dwelt beyond the Jordan (1 Chron. 5. 26), and it will be noticed that no mention is made of the tribes of Reuben and Gad as among those to whom Hezekiah's invitation went. We may doubtless include Shalmaneser, who, on his first expedition against Hoshea (2 Kings 17. 3), which probably took place before this time, would almost certainly follow Assyrian precedent in carrying off a body of captives. Indeed, if we may identify him with the Shalman of Hos. 10. 14, which, however, is doubtful, his invasion had been attended with exceptional atrocities.

Before the great multitude assembled in Jerusalem partakes of the Passover, a further act of purification is called for. The Temple is now free from all its past defilements, but Jerusalem, the Holy City, still has altars "in every corner" (2 Chron. 28. 24), erected by backsliding Ahaz, and testifying to the wide range of his polytheism. These altars, partly for



sacrifice and partly for incense, are now removed and cast into the Kidron. If it be asked why had not one thorough purification dealt at once with the Temple and all Jerusalem, it may fairly be answered that Hezekiah shewed his wisdom in beginning the positive part of his work at the earliest possible moment, to re-establish the worship of God even though all traces of idolatry had not yet been rooted out. It is on this principle that a wise missionary will ever seek to lay stress on the positive teaching of the truth as it is in Jesus, rather than use his energy overmuch in denunciations of errors, which, when once the truth is rooted, cannot live beside it.

It may well be supposed that in such a multitude, hurriedly got together from all parts of the land, coming, too, in many cases, from districts where the whole social fabric had collapsed, many, from lack of time and opportunity, had failed to purify themselves with the proper rites from ceremonial or other uncleanness. In the case of a Passover kept at the proper time, the opportunity was provided for such by the so-called "little Passover" of the second month; as it was, there was no such loophole. Hezekiah, with truest wisdom, decides that such men shall be allowed to eat the Passover, though ceremonially disqualified. Because of this disqualification, the Levites, and not the offerers, kill the lambs, and thus they are sanctified. Hezekiah's prayer, "The good LORD pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary," seems almost like a foreshadowing of our Lord's teaching in the Gospel, when even the scribe was forced to admit that to love God with all the heart was "more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

The feast having been kept for seven days, the intense rejoicing led them to celebrate it for seven days more, as on

the occasion of Solomon's great festival, when the feast of tabernacles continued for fourteen days. According to the traditional usage noted in the Talmud, besides various other differences between this little Passover and the normal one, is this, that the former lasted but one day. If, however, such a usage was really an ancient one, such a curtailing would obviously have been repugnant in such an exceptional outbreak of rejoicing.

This revival of the old worship, carried out not merely with superabundant zeal, but with an evident intention to perform the service in its fulness of ritual and sacred song, would put a considerable strain on the Levites, on whom, more even than on the priests, the stress would fall. To those Levites then, who were well skilled in the music and the other ritual, the good king speaks encouragingly. At length, the Passover accomplished, with such rejoicing the like of which had not been seen in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon, the priests\* blessed the people, and that blessing, itself a triple prayer to God, "came up to His holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven."

It can well be imagined that so large a gathering, brought together for so solemn a purpose, a multitude, too, not of the haphazard kind that some stirring incident would speedily bring together in one of our great towns, but one united by the tie of blood, and of a common religious belief eagerly embraced, anyhow for the time, would readily break forth into a flame of enthusiasm, which at first would bear down all obstacle. Even our more phlegmatic western nature is capable of the same. Peter the Hermit aroused whole multitudes to the wildest enthusiasm for the rescue of the Holy

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\* Lit. "the priests the Levites." For this the Vulgate, as also the Alexandrian MS. of the Septuagint reads "and the Levites," which is clearly wrong. The Divine command was given to the priests to bless (Num. 6. 23), and we never find Levites so acting. Moreover, the above phrase occurs elsewhere (Deut. 17. 9, 18).

Sepulchre; even the dour Scotch lowlander blazed up like an excitable Celt at the initiative of Jenny Geddes. How much more these fiery Orientals?

They would not brook the presence of the tokens of idolatry in the land. Jerusalem had been freed from such, why should the country districts still be polluted? Thus "all Israel that were present," the whole body of worshippers, swept like a flood, hither and thither, through the cities of Judah and Benjamin, and also of Ephraim and Manasseh.\* They found plenty to do. The "images" or obelisks (*matstseboth*) were shattered, the symbols of the Asherah were hewn down, and the *Bamoth* and idol-altars were overthrown. The *Bamoth*, or high-places, represented a worship of pre-Mosaic times, which had been tolerated by Samuel, who, coming as he did in an age when the priesthood was base to a degree, may naturally have condoned a form of worship not in accordance with the strict Levitical rule. So, whenever the clergy of some branch of the Christian Church had shewn themselves neglectful of their high functions, God-fearing men have been forced to discard part of the external framework of the Church, and make their appeal to God as best they might. Under the Monarchy, some curiously conflicting statements meet us on a comparison of the Books of Kings and Chronicles. Pious kings, such as Asa and Jehoshaphat, are said to have put down the worship of the high-places, while elsewhere they are said to have tolerated them (*see e.g.* 2 Chron. 14. 3, and *cf.* 1 Kings 15. 14, 2 Chron. 15. 17). It can hardly be supposed that such kings as the above would have tolerated direct idolatry in their kingdom, therefore the worship of the high-places, which, in spite of the Law of Moses, and in spite of royal efforts, survived so long, was an unauthorised and, indeed, forbidden form of

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\* The more remote northern tribes, it will be noticed, are not mentioned, as is natural.

the worship of Jehovah, forbidden for the very obvious reason that, under the conditions of Israelite life, this worship on countless hill-tops was a sure precursor of polytheism.

Thus, even though it comes in different guise from the worship of Baal and Asherah, and Assyrian deities brought in by Ahaz, it had potentialities of evil which must be suppressed; and how full of vitality it was plainly appears in that, thorough as Hezekiah's reformation was meant to be, the relapse of the two succeeding reigns sufficed to bring in the old evils once more, to be put down by Josiah. The work of reformation at last is achieved, both in the kingdom of Judah and in the more accessible parts of the kingdom of Israel. Hoshea, if he is not by this time in his Assyrian prison, must have had every thought directed, every energy strained, for a desperate resistance against his overwhelming foe.

The above details of Hezekiah's suppression of abuses are mainly taken from the full account in the Book of Chronicles, but curiously enough there is one further striking detail mentioned in the Book of Kings only, the destruction of the Brazen Serpent which Moses set up in the Wilderness. This had become an object of superstitious reverence to the Israelites, and they were in the habit of burning incense to it as to a quasi-deity. The account is not free from difficulties, but the main facts are clear, the idolatry and the destruction.\* One cannot refrain from a smile when we learn that, spite

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\* Two points are puzzling. First, where had the Brazen Serpent been since the time of Moses? Ewald suggests (*Hist. of Israel*, Vol. IV., p. 173 n, Eng. trans.) that it may have been left in the wilderness where it was first erected, and thither pilgrims paid visits of adoration to it, till it was removed to Jerusalem by Ahaz. This seems reasonable, for it is hard to suppose that kings like Asa and Jehoshaphat would have tolerated its presence as an idol in the Holy City. Dean Stanley, with the delightful positiveness which saves so much trouble to the reader, tells us (*Jewish Church*, Lect. 27, p. 214, ed. 2), that it belonged as a relic to the tabernacle at Gibeon, and was thence brought to Jerusalem at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. Thereupon it "was exhibited, if not in the Temple, yet somewhere in



of Hezekiah's breaking it in pieces, the Brazen Serpent is still exhibited to the gaze of the curious in the Church of St. Ambrose, at Milan.

There is still constructive work awaiting Hezekiah's care. The "courses" of the priests and Levites must have been utterly broken down by the long interruption to the Temple service : all this would have to be settled anew. The system of tithe had also doubtless been neglected, and much distress was obviously the consequence. The king sets the example with a noble alacrity, the royal tithe being devoted to the maintenance of the morning and evening burnt-offerings, the double offering of the Sabbath, and the larger offerings at new-moons and "set feasts." This fully warrants him in commanding the people of Jerusalem to do the like, that the priests and Levites may be "encouraged in the law of the LORD"; that they might be strengthened to the full discharge of their spiritual and ceremonial duties. His request meets with a ready response, and not only do the inhabitants of Jerusalem bring in first-fruits and tithes of all things in abundance, but also the Judæan inhabitants of the country districts and the Israelites who lived among them, and to whom no command is recorded to have been given, brought in their tithes of sheep and oxen and of things consecrated to God. Hezekiah clearly realized the wisdom of striking while the iron was hot, for while it was not till the middle of the second month that the Passover began and the festivities then lasted for a fortnight, yet in the course of

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Jerusalem" (*ib.* p. 216). This is of course an absolute guess. Again, the meaning of the clause "and he called it Nehushtan" is far from clear. The Hebrew equally allows us either (1) to take Hezekiah as the nominative to the verb, in which case the sense would be that Hezekiah spoke of the image contemptuously as "a piece of brass." This is the view of, *e.g.* the LXX. and Vulgate, and Jewish Rabbis, such as Rashi. Or again, (2) the verb may be treated as impersonal, leading to the meaning "and it was called Nehushtan," *i.e.* by the worshippers. What the idea is, however, on this view is doubtful. Possibly the name was meant as a sort of euphemism to avoid the direct mention of the *serpent*.

the third month the tithes began to come in, and by the seventh month, which brings us to the end of autumn, the last had been paid.

So great was the accumulated amount that after priests and Levites have had sufficient for their needs, Hezekiah and the princes come and see the heaps, "the great store," which remains over and above, and at his orders storehouses are prepared in the Temple where the surplus of the offerings are deposited. Is it not, one cannot help asking, to our disgrace, that the national Church of this, the richest country in Christendom, is so far from having surplus treasures, that the pecuniary distress of the poorer clergy cries aloud in shame?

One last duty remained for Hezekiah in connection with this work. In a system where the clergy and their families are maintained in the manner prescribed in the Law of Moses, it was necessary for the protection of individuals and as a check against possible fraud, that careful lists should be drawn up of priests and Levites and their families. Accordingly, the Chronicler mentions three lists which were drawn up, presumably by the king's order, though this is not expressly stated, one of priests arranged according to families, a second of all Levites from twenty years old and upwards (see 1 Chron. 23. 27), and a third of all little ones, wives, sons, and daughters, of both priests and Levites. None could find a place on the list without due qualification, none were passed over by the honest officers who attended to this duty.

Unfortunately, the wickedness of Manasseh broke down where Hezekiah had builded up, and the duty devolved on Josiah of restoring, with even greater thoroughness, the old paths; yet but for the sweeping reforms of Hezekiah who can say whether a Josiah could ever have risen, whether the nation would not rather have been absorbed into the empire of Sennacherib and passed out of sight?



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE WARRIOR, THE BUILDER, THE WISE KING.

HOW completely Hezekiah's heart was bound up with the religious reforms and how unswervingly he carried them through, we have seen in the preceding chapter. Yet kings before now have been profoundly religious men, in whom the absence of other qualifications for rule has made their reigns anything but a blessing to their people. The name of Edward the Confessor stands as that of a saint in the Anglican calendar, and the most glorious church in England is inseparably bound up with his name, yet during his reign the misgovernment of this country was lamentable, and to his unspeakable folly were largely due the horrors of the Norman conquest.

Not so Hezekiah—devout servant of the God of Israel, resolute and stronghanded warrior, like the best of the line of David before him, wise master-builder who “went round about Zion and told the towers thereof,” strengthening and repairing the defences of his capital, providing weapons of offence and defence in abundance, and with wise thoughtfulness having careful regard to the water-supply on which the very existence of his mountain fortress depended. Well may the annalist say (2 Kings 18. 6) “The LORD was with him.” Of no one since David had this been said, not of Solomon, or Asa, or Jehoshaphat.

In these words there is summed up the blessing which environed him, “he prospered whithersoever he went forth”; all his enterprises, military or pacific, were favoured by Divine

help. The Chronicler (2 Chron. 32. 27 *f.*) dwells lovingly on his "exceeding much riches and honour," and refers to the storehouses for corn and the like, and the stalls for cattle of every sort. "He provided him cities," by which we are perhaps to understand buildings for the numerous flocks and herds mentioned in the same verse (ver. 29) and for the array of men who tended them.

Turn we now to the other side of Hezekiah's kingship :—  
"He rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not. He smote the Philistines even unto Gaza and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city." As we have already said, some of the difficulties with regard to the chronology of Hezekiah's reign are at present insuperable ; in due time perhaps fresh discoveries may make things clearer. There is nothing here to shew directly at what point in Hezekiah's reign this rebellion against the king of Assyria, this casting off of the vassalage due to the suzerain, took place, and therefore we cannot say with certainty who the king of Assyria was who was thus defied ; but the natural inference from the story as told us in the Book of Kings would certainly be that it was near the beginning of his reign, following upon and perhaps in some sense due to the religious reforms. Now the succession of Tiglath-pileser by Shalmaneser on the throne of Assyria, and that of Ahaz by Hezekiah on the throne of Judah, are, it would seem, nearly contemporaneous events, and it seems reasonable to suppose that Shalmaneser may have been the suzerain in question. He had actually come up for the siege of Samaria in the fourth year of Hezekiah, and it might be asked why so mighty a monarch did not at once take in hand this other recalcitrant vassal. Clearly, however, Samaria alone was a sufficiently hard nut to crack, when it could hold at bay the armies of the mightiest monarch on earth for so long a time as three years. Moreover, those who hold this view find

support for it in the fact that at this same time Shalmaneser attacked Tyre, which held out under its king Elulæus for a desperate five years' resistance, which may have lasted into the reign of Sargon, as Shalmaneser's whole reign was only five years. The story is preserved by Josephus (*Ant.* ix. 14. 2), who cites the chronicles of Menander, which professedly were a Greek translation from the Tyrian records.

As no Assyrian inscription boasts of the capture of Tyre on this occasion, we may assume that, whatever damage the Assyrians succeeded in inflicting, they failed to take the city by storm. It is by no means improbable that it is to this siege that Isaiah refers in his twenty-third chapter.

With Tyre and Samaria both on hand then, the former uncaptured after a five years' siege and the latter requiring three years to subdue it, the Assyrians may well have thought it wise to leave so strong a fortress as Jerusalem for a more convenient season.

If the theory is accepted that Shalmaneser was the suzerain defied by Hezekiah, then we may clearly refer to this time the efforts to strengthen the fortifications and to secure the water-supply or anyhow an important part of them. (*See* 2 Kings 20. 20 ; 2 Chron. 32. 3-5, 30 ; Isa. 22. 8-11, 33. 18 ; Ps. 48. 13). To suppose that Hezekiah, if we credit him with having proper kingly wisdom, should have waited till he heard that Sennacherib was actually close at hand, in Judah and on the very point of coming to Jerusalem, before embarking on these preparations, would be absurd. The story in Chronicles doubtless requires us to believe that all details of defence were reviewed and put in thorough order, and certain things may have been added, yet obviously in the account of 2 Chron. 32. 3 *f.* is included the whole of Hezekiah's previous preparations. If he had allowed his fortifications to have become more or less dismantled, had no store of weapons

in his arsenal, had neglected the question of the water-supply, till Sennacherib was actually in Judah, he would have been guilty of folly and wickedness in the extreme, and we think it simply incredible.

If this view be correct, then the young king, still in the early days of his royalty, and his people who had so loyally followed his lead, must have felt the need of all their trust in God, all their resolution, all the patient care summed up in the one word *duty*, when such comparatively near cities as Samaria and Tyre were in the throes of such a death-struggle. If Ewald be right in referring to this period the prophecies of Isa. 22, then the matter is further complicated by trouble arising from the careless impenitence, and the misplaced festivity, of many in Jerusalem, dancing, as it were, on the edge of a volcano. The passage is, however, generally referred to the period of the invasion by Sennacherib.

Other scholars refer the rebellion to the beginning of the reign of Sennacherib, when, on the murder of that strong-handed soldier Sargon, his son had to face a confederacy which united most of the western part of his empire in revolt against him. That Hezekiah was in rebellion then is likely enough, yet it seems strange that the king, whose ideas of the relation between Jehovah and Israel were what they were, could have allowed twenty-three years to go by before asserting himself.

The annalistic inscription of Sennacherib, which we shall subsequently cite at length, shews that on Sennacherib's invasion Judah was more or less paramount in Philistia, in that the king of Ekron, who held Assyrian proclivities, was kept prisoner in Jerusalem.

This, however, still leaves the matter inconclusive, and we may next note the nature of the engineering work done by Hezekiah in connection with the water-supply of Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the evidence is still so uncertain that opinions

as to localities can only be given with extreme caution. Probably no one is entitled to speak with greater authority on questions of the topography of Jerusalem than Sir Charles Wilson. Yet he writes of the springs and pools mentioned in the Books of Kings and Chronicles in connection with Hezekiah: "any identification of these springs and pools must be purely conjectural."\*

We shall begin by citing the passages where the works of this kind are referred to. In the summary of the works of Hezekiah in the second Book of Kings, 20. 20, we are told that "he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city." The R.V. more strictly has "the pool," "the conduit," but we need not see in the articles more than the particular pool or conduit present to the mind of the writer. Nothing is said here, it will be noticed, as to the occasion for these works, but in the narrative in 2 Chron. 32. 4, it is distinctly connected with the fear of the Assyrians. Hezekiah takes counsel with his princes "to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city," so as to secure the fullest supply for themselves, and throw obstacles in the way of the Assyrians obtaining water. They therefore "stopped all the fountains and the brook (*nachal*) that ran (*lit.* overflowed) through the middle of the land." In a later verse (30) in the summary of Hezekiah's achievements, we have another allusion which may refer to the above incident, but may possibly have regard to an independent event. Here we are told that Hezekiah "stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down to the west side of the city of David."†

Hezekiah's engineering fame evidently impressed itself on the people, for five hundred years after his time the son of Sirach specially included it in his commemoration. "Ezekias fortified

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\* *Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I., p. 1593a, ed. 2.

† The A.V. is incorrect.



his city, and brought in water into the midst thereof, he digged the hard rock with iron, and made \* wells for waters " (Ecclus. 48. 17).

It would be out of place here to indulge in any elaborate topographical discussions, and we must confine ourselves to a broad general survey of probabilities. The word Gihon, it would seem, means a spring, and if this be so, then it must be the so-called "Fountain of the Virgin" in the Kidron valley, because this is the only real spring known close to Jerusalem.† In that case the "brook" which Hezekiah stopped would be the overflow of it. The water of the spring now flows through a tunnel in the rock into the Upper Pool of Siloam, and it would be natural, therefore, to see in this Hezekiah's work. But the case is a little complicated. There is also a Lower Pool of Siloam, and it is not quite clear which of the two is earliest in date, and on this the solution would partly depend. At any rate, experts speak with varying voice, clearly proving that the data are inconclusive. Sir Charles Wilson remarks, with reference to the tunnel to the Upper Pool, that "the remains of a rock-hewn conduit in the valley seem to indicate that, at an earlier period, the water was carried along the foot of the hill to the Lower Pool of Siloam."‡

On the other hand, Dr. Sayce, whose knowledge of Jerusalem is minute, speaks § of the "Lower Pool having been constructed to receive the overflow of the Upper one."

Everyone will feel very cautious as to broaching ideas on the subject, most of all students who can but derive their facts from books and have never seen the localities, yet we confess that the

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\* Lit. builded up. Though the Greek word *κρήνη* properly means a spring, the reference is clearly to tanks for the storage of water.

† But see Neh. 2. 13, where the *dragon well* is lit. a *fountain*. Sir Charles Wilson, however, thinks that this may simply "have been an outflow of the aqueduct from Solomon's Pools" (*Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I., p. 803b).

‡ *Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I., 1590a.

§ *Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 332.



view which most commends itself to our mind is the one very generally held, that Hezekiah's work was, or anyhow included, the tunnel from the spring of Gihon to the Upper Pool of Siloam. We thus deal honestly with the fact that it was a spring that Hezekiah then stopped. Again, in the later passage (2 Chron. 33. 14) we have a reference to "Gihon in the valley" (*nachal*), where we note that this word *nachal* is that always applied to the valley of Kidron, so that this suits the locality of the Virgin's fountain. Moreover, this work of Hezekiah evidently took hold of the imagination of those who came after him and was long commemorated. This implies that it was a work of exceptional difficulty and magnitude, such as tunnelling through the solid rock for one third of a mile, as this tunnel actually is. It would be pleasant to believe that this solution was the true one, as we should then be able definitely to connect with Hezekiah the famous Siloam inscription which till recently existed (alas that one should have to speak in the past tense) near the Siloam end of the tunnel.

It is right, however, to remark that Dr. Sayce sees an objection to this view in the mention of Shiloah in Isa. 8. 6.

While Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, is still king, the prophet speaks of "the waters of Shiloah, which go softly." But, Dr. Sayce adds, "Shiloah means tunnel or conduit," so that we must assume that the tunnel was excavated before the accession of Hezekiah, and the "going softly" of the waters would refer to the gentle flow of the water in its artificial channel.

We venture to think, however, that it is perhaps somewhat unsafe to assume that the source of the Shiloah was the Gihon, although the Targum and Peshito use it to interpret the Gihon of 1 Kings 1. 33 *f*. The word, which only occurs in Isa. 8. 6, means literally "a sending forth," and so may well be referred to a watercourse.

A good many (from Jerome's time onward) explain it of a little brook which came from a well in the south of the Tyropœon valley, and thence flowed past Moriah, and what has till lately been believed to be Zion.

If these scholars are right, then Shiloah is on the south side of Jerusalem, while Gihon is on the west, and the present objection would fall to the ground. Indeed we should have thought that in Isaiah's parallel of the Euphrates and the Shiloah, a brook would be more congruous than a conduit.

We have already said that there are two Pools of Siloam, an upper and a lower, a tunnel 1,708 feet long running from the Gihon to the former, and from thence is another tunnel to the latter. Dr. Sayce is inclined to think that the second, or lower, tunnel is more probably the one which Hezekiah made. But so far as this view rests on an inference from Isaiah's words we cannot think we are on safe ground, and to the other argument that the "upper spring" of Gihon implies a lower, and that it is hard to see what this lower one can be unless it is the (upper) pool of Siloam, it may be answered that the conduit made by Hezekiah came, not from a pool, but from a spring (Gihon). Moreover, the fame which attached to Hezekiah's work seems to imply something of special difficulty and magnitude, which suits the upper tunnel rather than the lower.

If this view be taken, the Siloam inscription of which we have spoken will of course be of the reign of Hezekiah, and the oldest Hebrew inscription, from Israelite hands, known to exist. A graphic account of the manner of its discovery and of the difficulties attending its decipherment is given by Dr. Sayce,\* who spent three afternoons sitting in the water and mud of the tunnel painfully copying the inscription by the dim light of a candle.

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\* *Op. cit.*, p. 373.

The inscription was originally discovered by a native pupil of Mr. Schick, a German architect long settled in Jerusalem, who, when wading near the Siloam end of the tunnel, slipped into the water, and on coming to the surface found that there were letters cut on the rock.

Several experts devoted much pains to the work of decipherment, and the result was an inscription in pure Biblical Hebrew, which tells the story of the construction of the tunnel. On palæographical grounds it is said that we may refer the inscription to about the end of the eighth century B.C., that is, to the period of Hezekiah.

Besides the linguistic value of the inscription, as shewing that the language spoken in Jerusalem before the Exile was that which we find in the Old Testament, it has a further value in the light it sheds on the engineering skill of the day. We learn from it that the work of excavation was begun at both ends. Although the tunnel winds so as to follow the softer lines of rock, the two sets of workmen so nearly met in the middle that the noise of the picks of one party was heard by the other. Near the middle of the tunnel are two *culs de sac*, "the extreme points reached by the two gangs," when each became conscious of the other's presence. All that had then to be done was to break through the rock between the two *culs de sac*. Dr. Sayce justly points out that if regard be had to the length of the tunnel, its winding and its depth below the surface, it is plain that considerable professional skill was shewn by the superintendents of the work, testifying to the high level of civilisation then reached in Jerusalem.

He adds also that the letters in the inscription shew by their rounded shape that the scribes of Judah had long been accustomed to the art of writing on papyrus or parchment. This would of course shew that, before the reign of Hezekiah, actual manuscripts, not merely inscriptions, must have been

plentiful in the Jewish Kingdom. We now subjoin the actual inscription, following the translation of Dr. Sayce, "[Behold] the excavation! Now this is the history of the excavation. While the excavators were lifting up the pick, each towards his neighbour, and while there were yet three cubits to [excavate, there was heard] the voice of one man calling to his neighbour, for there was an excess in the rock on the right hand [and on the left]. And after that on the day of excavating the excavators had struck pick against pick, one against the other, the waters flowed from the spring to the pool for a distance of 1,200 cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock over the head of the excavators."\*

Besides the work spent on the aqueduct, Hezekiah did much to the fortifications. "He built up all the wall that was broken" (2 Chron. 32. 5), repairing the numerous breaches (Isa. 22. 9) which the carelessness of the reign of Ahaz had allowed to go from bad to worse. Also "he raised *it* up to the towers." The Hebrew of the clause thus translated in the A.V. and the R.V. is not clear. If we accept this rendering, the meaning would be that Hezekiah raised the height of the wall so as to be on a level with the towers which Uzziah had built. Of the two renderings given in the margin of the R.V., the first, "he heightened the towers," though it would be a very natural thing for Hezekiah to have done, seems, we think, to involve some little violence to the Hebrew. The other marginal rendering, "went up upon the towers," does not commend itself. The Septuagint cuts the knot by omitting two words, "built up all the broken wall and towers . . . .," while the Vulgate, by a slight modification of the Hebrew, gives "built towers thereon," a rendering which Ewald accepts. Besides these restorations, be they what they may, Hezekiah further builds another wall outside the existing

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\* *Op. cit.*, p. 379.



one. The double wall is referred to by Isaiah (22. 11; cf. 2 Kings 25. 4), who speaks also of the ditch, or rather, reservoir, which had been made between them.

Further, "he repaired Millo (or, more strictly, the Millo) *in* the city of David." It is impossible to speak with any certainty as to the meaning of this word Millo. The name goes back to the days when the Jebusites held Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5. 9), and, after the conquest of the city by David, it formed part of the "city of David"; and, as the passage now before us shews, it must have been in some sense a fortification. It will be noticed that the *in* of the English versions is printed in italics, and it is possible that the translation should be "Millo, even the city of David," as though the two terms were used as equivalents.

One care more a wise commander would have, the due provision of weapons, "darts, and shields in abundance." The derivation of the former word shews that it is equivalent to our word "missile," and the change from the "darts" of the A.V. to the "weapons" of the R.V. seems uncalled for. All being ready, the king gathers his captains together to bid them be strong and courageous, and not to be dismayed at the mighty hosts of the king of Assyria.

No nobler words of faith were ever uttered by men in extremity, who, in the uttermost need, never lost sight of Him Who was their strength, than those words of Hezekiah: "There be more with us than with him; with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." Though Hezekiah's own faith after this did temporarily fail, as we shall see, and resolution was replaced by submission, yet while human infirmity is what it is, we must expect the like. St. Peter's faith was undoubted when he uttered those memorable words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," yet shortly after he was rebuked

with the terrible reproach, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and was the one apostle other than Judas whose denial is put on record. Yet how nobly his after labours shine in the Christian story.

And now we may give a passing glance at another aspect of our king's reign. Is it too much to assume that in his way he was an encourager of literature? We have already called attention to Dr. Sayce's remark that the shape of the letters in the Siloam inscription suggested a long *literary* use of writing in the kingdom of Judah. This inference is strikingly borne out by the one historic fact which we possess bearing on the point.

At the head of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Proverbs we read, "These also are Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out." A stray allusion like this is as conclusive as a much longer record. We know that the Assyrian and the Babylonian kings employed large bodies of scribes in copying, editing we might almost call it, the older literature of the country of every kind, and the great library of Asshur-bani-pal, unearthed by Layard and George Smith at Koyunjik, much of which now reposes in the British Museum, specially comes to mind. The "men of Hezekiah," we can quite believe, were of the same stamp as the Assyrian scribes, and assuredly "the art of writing books was no new thing in Israel," and we can echo Dr. Sayce's incisive remark that "we have no reason to doubt that the 'men of Hezekiah' did copy out the 'proverbs of Solomon,' and they were more likely to know whose proverbs they were than the most accomplished critic of to-day."

On what materials these scribes wrote, we do not venture to say. They may have used papyrus imported from Egypt, or they may have prepared leather such as that on which the



scrolls of the Law were written in after days, or, for aught we can tell, they may have used such clay tablets as those which come in such profusion from the mounds of Babylonia, and have more recently been found at Tel el-Amarna and Lachish. In any case, whatever the material, there is no reason why records of the age of Solomon should not have been existing in the age of Hezekiah.

It is reasonable to hold that Hezekiah was not merely an encourager of literature, but that he was a writer of original poems himself. The one "writing of Hezekiah" which Isaiah has preserved for us, full as it is of such deep meaning, and penned in such vigorous though abrupt style, cannot have been a solitary composition of the king. Like his forefathers, David and Solomon, he doubtless had the gift of song, though, unlike them, next to nothing has survived. He was no rugged half-barbaric sovereign, a mere warrior with no thought except to safeguard his own territories or to plunder his neighbours, but one who, while a soldier, was also a cultured man of letters, and a prudent, far-seeing statesman.

## CHAPTER VII.

“SICK UNTO DEATH.” “I WILL ADD UNTO THY DAYS  
FIFTEEN YEARS.”

WE have already spoken of the difficulty, or rather, in the present state of our knowledge, the impossibility, of reconciling the Biblical and the Assyrian chronology for the period we are now considering. At the cost of a certain amount of repetition we must briefly return to the subject, with the view of fixing in its proper place Hezekiah's great illness.

A cursory reader of the Bible story would be inclined to assign that illness and the visit of congratulation of the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan to a date subsequent to the miraculous deliverance from the hosts of Sennacherib. Yet two considerations will shew that this can hardly be. The promise, “I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 20. 6), clearly points to a time when the thunder cloud was an object of dread, and Merodach-baladan would have been in no position to send an embassy, if indeed he were alive, after Sennacherib's return.

The difficulty centres in 2 Kings 18. 13, where an invasion by Sennacherib is referred to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, and therefore to a period eight years subsequent to the fall of Samaria, which happened in the sixth year of his reign. The Bible thus allows an interval of eight years between the two events, whereas the Assyrian monuments allow 21 years, the former event happening in the year of the accession of

Sargon (722 B.C.), the latter in the fourth year of Sennacherib.\* If, then, the Assyrian results are to be accepted, and there seems no sufficient ground for challenging them, some modification in the Bible numbers is necessary. We must briefly indicate various solutions which have been proposed, and must return to the subject again in the following chapter. A view put forth nearly forty years ago by the late Dr. E. Hincks, which, with some modifications, has been accepted by many scholars, is as follows. He suggests that we should read 2 Kings 18. 13 thus: "Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, the king of Assyria came up." This he refers to an invasion by Sargon. Next he would place 20. 1-19, the whole story of the illness, the recovery, and the visit of congratulation. Then, returning to 18. 13, "And Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them." A modification of this is to take the whole paragraph 18. 13-16 of the invasion of Sargon, which involves altering the name of the king of Assyria in *v.* 13. There are others, such as Sir Henry and Canon Rawlinson, who instead of this see in *vv.* 13-16 and in *v.* 17 *f.* two distinct invasions by Sennacherib. But since the date "the fourteenth year of Hezekiah" would be impossible, unless we are prepared totally to reject the Assyrian chronology, the knot may be cut by assuming that the note of time is simply a gloss which has crept into the text, though Sir Henry Rawlinson thought it "the least change" to alter fourteenth into twenty-seventh. Canon Rawlinson justly points out that since the illness certainly befell in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, since 15 years more are granted to him, and he reigns in all 29 years, it is possible that a scribe assumed that the illness followed immediately on the invasion, and so obtained his date for the latter.

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\* Schrader, II, 169.

It is always rather a dangerous thing to go counter to the view of experts on their special ground, but on the present occasion there is no choice; a variety of theories has found a variety of defenders, and the wisest inference to draw from this is that matters are so doubtful that caution spells wisdom. In our next chapter we shall take the view that sufficient ground has not been shewn for an invasion of Judah by Sargon, or for more than one invasion by Sennacherib. It would be most unwise to speak with any decided positiveness for any hypothesis.

If the view we advocate be correct, then the promise of 2 Kings 20. 6 has but one invasion to look forward to; if we accept the theory of an invasion by Sargon, we must either assume that it was quite ineffective as far as Jerusalem was concerned, or else refer the illness of Hezekiah and the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors to the reign of Sennacherib. Those who maintain that there were two invasions by Sennacherib, like Canon Rawlinson, place the illness in the reign of Sargon. We mention to deprecate strongly the solution proposed by a distinguished English "higher critic." He accepts the theory of an invasion by Sargon, and if this is to be placed in "the fourteenth year," the invasion and the illness will approximately coincide. He then adds a reason, which seems to us a far from conclusive one, for throwing the illness after the invasion. But what of the promise of 2 Kings 20. 6, Isa. 38. 6? It "must be a late and inharmonious insertion. . . . The latest editor, in whose time the invasion of Sargon was forgotten, made Hezekiah's illness coincide more or less exactly with the invasion of Sennacherib." One could almost suppose sometimes that higher critics must have been present inspecting the work when the books of the Old Testament were composed. It will be seen that this reckless suggestion, imputing at once stupidity and dishonesty to the sacred editor, rests ultimately

upon what, whether probable or not, is certainly not a demonstrated fact—the invasion of Sargon.

We may now turn to Merodach-baladan, and see how our knowledge of his career enables us to fix the date of his embassy. Of this Babylonian patriot, the undaunted champion of his country against the overwhelming tyranny of Assyria, we have already briefly spoken. The evidence of the cuneiform records, and of the Canon of Ptolemy, agrees in giving to Merodach-baladan a reign of 12 years, answering approximately to the first 12 years of the reign of Sargon. In the twelfth year of the reign of Sargon (710 B.C.), the Assyrian king defeated and drove out Merodach-baladan. Sargon was assassinated in 705 B.C., and a revolutionary interregnum ensued at Babylon, when Merodach-baladan again seized the sovereignty, and held it for six months. Then he was overthrown by Sennacherib, and, according to the fragment of Polyhistor preserved by Eusebius,\* was slain by Elibus (or Belibus). Yet there is a difficulty in that Sennacherib, some years after, says that he again subdued “the same Merodach-baladan whom he had conquered in his first campaign.”† Still, whatever be the truth of the matter, it hardly concerns us on this occasion. Even if this intrepid Babylonian made a third attempt to throw off the Assyrian yoke, the date would be altogether out of the question for the embassy to Hezekiah.

As between the rule in Babylon of Merodach-baladan in the reigns of Sargon and of Sennacherib as the likelier period for the embassy, it is not easy to decide, and each view has found its supporters. If we believe that Hezekiah’s illness fell a considerable period before the invasion (or invasions) by Sennacherib, then obviously the embassy must be placed in the

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\* Schrader, II. 26, *noie*.

† We do not discuss this difficulty here. Reference may be made to Dr. Schrader (II. 27, 302).



reign of Sargon. Others, who make the illness more or less contemporaneous with Sennacherib's invasion, place the embassy in the reign of this last king. The natural inference from the Bible narrative seems to favour the later view, which is that adopted by Dr. Schrader (*see* 2 Kings 20. 1, 12 : *cf.* v. 6 and 18. 2, 13). Yet, on the other hand, Dr. Sayce and others have much to say for the earlier date. In this case the reference to the "fourteenth year" of Hezekiah (18. 13) looks to the invasion of Sargon, and, as Dr. Sayce puts it, "the historical perspective will have been shortened, . . . and to the age of one who wrote more than a century later, the two invasions . . . will have blended into a single struggle." With experts then at variance, and the evidence indeterminate, we must leave the matter. Yet whatever conclusion be come to, it must remain undoubted that the illness and subsequent embassy preceded the threatened attack by Sennacherib. This at once follows from three facts. To put it later would take the point out of the promise of 2 Kings 20. 6. An embassy by Merodach-baladan is hardly conceivable after Sennacherib's return to Nineveh, if indeed he were then surviving; and the display by Hezekiah of his treasury to the ambassadors clearly points to a date before Sennacherib's demands for tribute had emptied it.

We may now leave the question of the date, and content ourselves with holding that at any rate the illness preceded all that we are told of Hezekiah in the Bible, except his religious reforms. We now come to the question of the illness itself. The attack, a severe boil or carbuncle, whether or not due to an epidemic, of which nothing is said, seemed, humanly speaking, destined to be fatal. Nor was this gloomy view of things merely the despondent opinion of the patient and his attendants; the message is brought to him by one whose authority he had learnt to trust, "thou shalt die and not live." It may be said



that this message of Isaiah was falsified by Hezekiah's subsequent recovery, but clearly this declaration of God, as so many others, is to be viewed as conditional. Under his present physical condition, Hezekiah must certainly die, yet God, Who ruled all things according to His will, might intervene and save; prayer might avail, human means were obviously useless.

"Hezekiah wept sore,"—with a great weeping, says the Hebrew. The highly-wrought emotional nature of the Oriental shuddered at the thought of all that death meant. We may briefly outline his thoughts, as they followed the outlook of this present world, or gazed in awe at the unknown beyond. The death would be a sad one in many ways; he was to be cut off in the very prime and strength of manhood, for according to the numbers given in the Bible he was 39 years old. Premature death, too, was viewed as in some sort a mark of Divine displeasure; Hezekiah may well have thought of Solomon's words "The fear of the LORD longeth days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened," and have asked himself whether he had not indeed sought to serve God with all his heart. It would seem, too, that at this time he had no son, for his successor Manasseh was only 12 years old at his accession, and therefore was born after his father's recovery. To the Eastern mind at all times the idea of childlessness was peculiarly abhorrent; the lament of the childless Abraham, the doom on the sinful Jehoiachin, and the like, occur at once to the mind; while such promises as "thou shalt see thy children's children" rank prominently among the highest earthly blessings. Yet in Hezekiah's case there was more than the common grounds for grief. Were he to die leaving no son behind him, it would be a very serious blow to the dynasty of David's house. We cannot tell how far it might have been necessary to go back to find the line through which to

trace the heir, but anyhow there was a risk of a disputed succession, pre-eminently perilous to Judah as she was then situated. The perils which beset her in any case were grievous enough without the further trouble of intestine discord. As Hezekiah lay, in expectation of the end, it can have been no small trouble to his heart to think that his successor was some one distantly connected in blood, perhaps of totally different aims and ideals from his own, or perhaps he even failed to guess who would succeed him.

What now of the other side, of his own future? It has become a common-place with many writers to say that the Jews of the Old Testament period had no knowledge of, or belief in, a future state, and thus that "Hezekiah regarded death as the end of existence." Obviously, of course, we must not look for anything approximating to the fulness of Christian belief in the Old Testament, yet references to a future state, and, still more, to a bodily resurrection, can be seen in not a few places. Nor again is there anything, as we shall seek to shew, in the "writing of Hezekiah," pointing to the conclusion that he thought death the absolute end. Let us take two examples by way of illustration. The arguments by which it has been sought to rob Isaiah of chapters 24-27 of his book, have always seemed to us singularly inconclusive, and in one of these chapters comes the glorious apocalypse, "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise : awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust." If we believe that the author of these glowing words was one who was an intimate friend and adviser of the king, can we doubt that Hezekiah must often have heard words like these in his ears, and must have had definite hopes in some sort of a future life? Yet again, in reading the "writing of Hezekiah," we cannot but be profoundly struck with the way in which the Book of Job has influenced its phraseology. This we shall seek to point out in detail by-and-

bye. Yet have any words, written in the full light of Christian knowledge, ever cast into the shade that echo of far-off ages, "I know that my Redeemer liveth"?\* Pale and dimly outlined was the hope of this sufferer in the far-off patriarchal ages, yet none the less real and abiding.

Still we must allow that the future, though a reality, is too vague to bring any solid comfort. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall. So Ahab had done, more like a sulky schoolboy than a man, much less a king, because he could not cajole Naboth out of his vineyard. Hezekiah, by prayer and weeping, sought to move God to mercy. He pleads that he had walked before God "in truth and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in His sight." Strange words if viewed from the Christian standpoint, when we think of the chief of the apostles speaking of himself as the chief of sinners. Yet in the light of the code of morality as then understood, such a vindication was natural enough, and underlies some of the passionate appeals of David to God in the Psalms.

So God viewed the prayer, and the answer quickly came. God, Who heareth prayer, heareth always, yet He does not by any means always answer the prayer as the speaker sought, but in the wisdom of a higher mercy. Yet at times the appeal is answered at once. So here, for Isaiah has not yet passed out of the palace, † when the further message of God reaches him, and he returns to the sufferer. The promise covers the whole field of hope. Recovery, and that a speedy one, is

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\* This is not the place to enter into any discussion as to the local difficulties of this passage. It must suffice here to say that though there is a certain ambiguity in the Hebrew in the clause rendered "yet in my flesh shall I see God," yet in all essentials the meaning of the passage is undoubted. The speaker puts his certain trust on record, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

† As may be seen from the English Version, there are two rival readings in the Hebrew of this verse, "city" and "court." The latter is the *Kri*, or traditional Masoretic reading [the former is the reading of the MSS. or *Cthiv*], and has the support of the LXX. and the other ancient versions. The latter certainly seems the likelier.

promised, a long further lease of life, and deliverance from the dread Assyrian. Yet further to deepen the effect of the message, Hezekiah is spoken of by a title, “the Captain of My people,” once frequently used of David, but applied to none of his descendants till now.

The healing is not performed by a word of command, but a remedy is ordered, which was probably a well recognised one, into which the power would enter, a mere lump or plaister or poultice of figs. Not unfrequently do we note, even in the New Testament, that the visible means adopted for the working of a miracle is something which as of itself, though in infinitesimal degree, would tend to the desired result, but which to achieve its purpose needs quickening and development from above. Such were Elisha’s casting the meal into a pot of poisonous herbs, the anointing of sick folk with oil by the apostles, the feeding of a multitude with a few loaves by our Saviour and by Elisha. So, too, the figs possessed a certain curative power, which, slight as it was, is utilised as the means for a complete cure.

At this stage Hezekiah remembers that his father Ahaz had once received from the lips of this same Isaiah an equally emphatic promise of deliverance, though in this case it was national, not personal, and had actually been bidden by God to ask for a sign to convince him. Ahaz had not dared ; yet this command to Ahaz emboldened Hezekiah to ask for a sign for his own case. Presumably, Hezekiah’s request came at once upon the promise, or at any rate the medical treatment ; and the writer of the Book of Kings had merely said by anticipation, and to sum up the result, “he recovered.” Isaiah shews by his answer that the request was a right one in God’s sight, and as Ahaz was bidden to ask for his sign in the depth or in the height, so Hezekiah is allowed to choose whether the shadow of the dial should advance or recede ten degrees. It



is impossible to say with certainty the exact nature of this miracle, because it is impossible to speak with certainty as to what is meant by the "dial." Yet, of whatever sort it may have been, we have in this miracle, as in the miracle at Ajalon, something which implies an overriding, in some sense, of cosmic laws.

Before going on to speak of the miracle, we may add a further remark as to the nature of Hezekiah's sickness. The word which describes it does not often occur in the Bible. It is used for the boils which formed one of the plagues of Egypt (Ex. 9. 9-11), of that from which leprosy sprang (Lev. 13. 18*f.*), of the "boil of Egypt" (Deut. 28. 27 ; *cf.* 35), and it was with this that Job was smitten (Job 2. 7). These are the only places where the word is found, save in the two accounts of Hezekiah's illness. If regard be had to the passage of Leviticus, it will be seen that the presence of this boil was suggestive of the possibility of leprosy, so that even if the ailment were not fatal, Hezekiah would have had to submit to a life-long exclusion from the sanctuary, such as had befallen his great grandfather Uzziah. This doubtless gives a further point to the question, "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD ?"

We come now to the question of the miracle itself. It may be noted first that the word translated "dial" in the English Version is the same as that translated "degrees" in *vv.* 9, 10, 11. The literal meaning of the word is "ascent," and so "steps," and it is so translated several times in the English Bible (*e.g.* Ex. 20. 26 ; 1 Kings 10. 19). Opinions, however, differ as to how we should take the word here. Some would take the idea of an obelisk at the head of a flight of steps, casting a shadow on the steps which would lengthen as the sun sank in the heavens. Others suppose that we have here something of the nature of an actual sun-dial. On the one hand, the literal

meaning of the word might be thought to favour the former theory ; yet it would surely seem more natural that such a means of measuring time should have had its name from the obelisk which cast the shadow than from the steps or stairs on which the shadow was cast. Moreover, we are told by Herodotus (ii. 109) that the Babylonians were the inventors of the *gnomon*, that is, the common sun-dial with its index, and the *polos*, which would seem to be a concave dial, and that the Greeks learnt from them the twelvefold division of the day into hours. Ahaz's meeting with the Assyrian king at Damascus may have brought to his knowledge this invention, and he may have reproduced one from the foreign model as in the case of the altar that so struck his fancy. Between the two possibilities it is useless to guess ; the ancient versions are divided, and in either case the miracle is essentially the same.

If it be asked how was the miracle wrought—was the earth's rotary motion reversed, did an earthquake alter the height of the obelisk, or did a solar eclipse cause the shadows to lengthen, while when the obscuration was over the shadows shortened, or the like?—it seems to us futile to enquire. If we accept the story of the miracle, we must admit that God's ways are past finding out. We deal in miracle not with difference in degree only, but in kind ; omnipotence and omniscience are not simply human power and human knowledge vastly magnified. The question may well be asked on such theories, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" The theory of the eclipse seems to us singularly out of place. The only element of miracle it would yield us would be that Isaiah foresaw the miracle and its effects, and yet the prophet is brought before us as giving Hezekiah the two alternatives, and when he had made his choice, crying to God in prayer to grant the sign. Moreover, the wonderful recovery was plainly noised abroad,



and it has justly been pointed out that the Babylonian envoys would have been the last people in the world to have been impressed with what after all was the *normal* effect of an eclipse. On either idea as to the dial, we may fancy Hezekiah, as he lay on his couch, in sight of the shadow of the dial and able himself to note the change. The third day came, God's promise was made sure, and Hezekiah offered his thanksgiving in the Temple. His full heart found vent in the Psalm of praise which Isaiah has preserved for us, the "Writing\* of Hezekiah" (Isa. 38. 9 f.),

9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness :

10 I said in the cutting off of my days,  
I shall go to the gates of the grave:  
I am deprived of the residue of my years.

11 I said, I shall not see the LORD,  
Even the LORD, in the land of the living:  
I shall behold man no more  
With the inhabitants of the world.

12 Mine age is departed, and is removed from me  
As a shepherd's tent:  
I have cut off like a weaver my life:  
He will cut me off with pining sickness:  
From day *even* to night  
Wilt thou make an end of me.

13 I reckoned till morning, *that*, as a lion,  
So will he break all my bones:  
From day *even* to night  
Wilt thou make an end of me.

14 Like a crane *or* a swallow, so did I chatter:  
I did mourn as a dove:  
Mine eyes fail *with looking* upward:  
O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.

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\* In Hebrew *Michtabh*, which some would view as equivalent to *Michtam* in the heading of certain Davidic psalms, whether by interchange of the final letter, or by an error of spelling. The latter word is of doubtful meaning, but probably means an inscribed, or even an emblazoned, psalm. The meaning of the former word, however, as it stands, "a writing," is quite sufficient.

- 15 What shall I say?  
He hath both spoken unto me,  
And himself hath done *it*:  
I shall go softly all my years  
In the bitterness of my soul.
- 16 O Lord, by these *things men* live,  
And in all these *things*  
Is the life of my spirit:  
So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.
- 17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness:  
But thou hast in love to my soul  
*Delivered it* from the pit of corruption:  
For thou hast cast all my sins  
Behind thy back.
- 18 For the grave cannot praise thee,  
Death can *not* celebrate thee:  
They that go down into the pit  
Cannot hope for thy truth.
- 19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee,  
As I *do* this day:  
The father to the children shall make known thy truth.
- 20 The LORD *was ready* to save me:  
Therefore we will sing my songs  
To the stringed instruments  
All the days of our life  
In the house of the LORD.

This poem is marked at once by intense feeling, and by a high literary skill, though not rising to the level of many of the Psalms. It falls naturally into two main divisions, vv. 10-14, in which the writer dwells on his past sufferings and the sorrow which held him, and vv. 15-20, in which he breaks forth into thankfulness. The condensation of the style has given rise to a number of local difficulties, which it is outside our present purpose to discuss, and we must content ourselves with briefly indicating the line of thought. The strophe recalls first the thought of cutting short the life in its prime (vv. 10-12), under the metaphors of striking a tent, and of cutting the thread in the loom; then it dwells on the

sufferings (*vv.* 13, 14) amid which life is ebbing away. The tone throughout is one of plaintive sadness, and images an unavailing appeal, as though God had forgotten to be gracious. Yet we believe the sad cry of *v.* 11 to amount to the regret that he may no more with the crowd of worshippers present himself in the sanctuary (*cf.* Psalm 42. 4), or in the world gaze upon the kindly faces of his fellows. That Hezekiah's hope as to the future, while a shadowy one compared with that of Christians, still was real, we believe to be a fair inference from the existence of Old Testament writings which Hezekiah must have known, in which the doctrine of a future life is taught, as well as from the bright joyousness, which otherwise loses much of its force, which animates his thanksgiving.

The first part of the thanksgiving (*vv.* 15-17) rather looks to the immediate lesson of thankfulness arising out of the past event. God has promised, and He has fulfilled His promise; therefore the rest of my life shall be like that of one walking thankfully as in a religious procession (*see* Ps. 42. 4 [5, Heb.], the only other place where the verb occurs), in the strength of the bitter lesson, by which, like wholesome medicine, I have profited. It is in training like mine that spiritual life consists, and all the bitterness finds its result in blessing, for not merely have I been saved from death, but "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." The tenour of *vv.* 16, 17, dwells exclusively on the spiritual side. Hezekiah has learnt that God's discipline of His faithful children is not wrath, but love. "Altogether in this is the life of my spirit." \* This leads him to the final outburst of praise and thankfulness (*vv.* 18-20). Even though the Saviour had not then come to triumph over death, yet we can believe that Hezekiah, like his far-off ancestor Abraham, "rejoiced to see His day." In that hope,

\* The compression of the Hebrew allows fully of this width of translation.

not indeed definite as to the eyes of a dying Christian, he can say, "The LORD was and is near to save me."

We have already spoken of the influence of the Book of Job on the wording of this poem, and shall seek to exemplify it in a little detail. We must remember that Hezekiah may well in thought have dwelt on Job as an image of himself. A righteous man serving God with all his heart, overwhelmed with trouble upon trouble, he is unable from the religious standpoint of his day to realise how, with such a record as his, such a mass of ills could have come upon him. Moreover, even the very form of the physical trouble was the same. Besides the general tenour of the animating thought, we note the following verbal parallels :—

- v. 10. "The gates of the grave" (*Sheol*). See Job 38. 17, "The gates of the shadow of death."
- v. 12a. The body is viewed as the *abode* of the man (*cf.* 2 Cor. 5. 1 *f.*). See Job 4. 19.
- v. 12b. Life as a thread woven. *Cf.* Job 7. 6 and the metaphor of the "shuttle."
- "He will cut me off." This not very common Hebrew word is also used of cutting off man's life in Job 6. 9 ; 27. 8.
- "From day even to night." So, in this sense, Job 4. 20.
- v. 13. For the metaphor of the "lion," *cf.* Job 10. 16, where, however, a different word is used.
- v. 14. "Be surety for me." See Job 17. 3.
- v. 15. "Bitterness of my soul." See Job 7. 11 ; 10. 1.
- v. 16. "In all these things," A.V. "Wholly therein," R.V. The awkward grammatical phrase of the Hebrew finds a parallel in Job 22. 21.
- v. 17. For the essential thought of the verse, see Job 5. 17, 18.
- "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it." A tiny change in the pronounciation of the *verb* here would give an exact parallel with Job 33. 18.
- v. 18. "Hades, Death." *Cf.* Job 28. 22.

Hezekiah's illness and recovery, and the miracle with which the latter was heralded, was evidently widely noised abroad, and from far-off Babylon ambassadors came to bear the

congratulations of Merodach-baladan their king. A further reason is indicated by the author of the Chronicles, one that would appeal strongly to the Chaldæan mind. The astronomers of the ancient world would be likely to feel a keen interest in so inexplicable an astronomical wonder, and so "sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land." Yet beneath these two ostensible causes, each doubtless a perfectly real one, there lay the real *causa causans*, the desire to win over Hezekiah, with his hardy soldiery, his well-filled treasure house, and his well nigh impregnable mountain-fortress, into an alliance against the common tyrant. It was, of course, desirable to have some ostensible reason to be kept well on the surface, so as not unduly to excite the suspicions of the Assyrians; it might, perhaps, gain a little time, though we can hardly suppose it would be possible to succeed for any length of time in throwing dust into the eyes of the astute statesmen and warriors who directed the destinies of the Assyrian Empire.

We have already said that it does not seem possible to settle with any approach to certainty the question as to which king of Assyria it was against whom the confederacy was planned, Sargon or Sennacherib, and we do not propose to discuss the question further. If it be Sennacherib, the conclusion which the actual grouping of the Bible story would seem rather to favour, Merodach-baladan's attempt came to a very untimely end, as six months seem to have been the whole duration of his reign. If, on the other hand, Sargon then ruled at Nineveh, as Canon Rawlinson and Dr. Sayce hold, a view which broader questions of general likelihood seem to make more reasonable, then the struggle was a somewhat more protracted one.

To return now to the embassy. Other ambassadors with letters and presents from their sovereign had often appeared



at Jerusalem before, but these are the first from far distant, famous Babylon, the ancient city, which, though not at this time at the head of her imperial greatness, still had the glamour of ancient glory circling round her, she from whom all-powerful Nineveh had been but an offshoot. Hezekiah plainly feels flattered by the honour done him, and, it is clear, listens with friendly ear to the suggestions of an alliance.\* "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly," says Solomon, and Hezekiah feels it incumbent upon himself to shew the ambassadors how valuable an ally he is likely to prove. He takes them through his treasure house; they see his silver and gold, and his arsenal; "there was not anything that he shewed them not." Clearly the real purpose of the embassy was patent to him; if he did not guess it at once, the first private audience would explain all. Thus he, on whom so signal a token of God's mercy had been shewn, fell into a twofold sin: his heart was lifted up; like David when tempted to the vain glory of numbering Israel; like Nebuchadnezzar, who spoke of the Babylon he had built "for the honour of his majesty," so Hezekiah let his heart be lifted up in pride, and forgot for the time the mercy just bestowed upon him.

Yet there was more than this, another and perhaps a graver cause brought wrath on him and his people. Not long before he had heard the Divine message, "I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria." Did Hezekiah suppose that God needed allies to effect this purpose, that he thus struck hands with the messengers of a heathen power, with men who would view Jehovah as a deity co-ordinate with Nebo, or Bel, or Merodach, or rather subordinate? For what

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\* The text in 2 Kings 20. 13 says that he "hearkened to them," but in the parallel passage in Isa. 39. 2 we have "was glad of them." The difference in the Hebrew word is that of one letter only, and as some Hebrew MSS. read the latter in Kings, and as this is supported by the LXX. and all the other ancient versions, it may probably be accepted in the text of Kings, as yielding a much more pointed sense.

was Jerusalem that it should stand on equal terms with ancient and mighty Babylon ?

To Isaiah's stern and curt questions, "What have these men said ?" "Whence have they come ?" Hezekiah, it will be noticed, answers equivocally. The first and more important question he leaves unanswered, and lays stress on the second as though to suggest that it was only right to shew all courtesy to those who had come so far. Clearly Isaiah knows the whole truth. He is speaking under direct inspiration, for he says, "Hear the word of Jehovah"; and the message which follows, looking on beyond the immediate line of events, pictures the far-off days, when that which must have seemed so utterly incredible should come to pass, the captivity in Babylon.

To Hezekiah such a statement, were it not for the solemn declaration of its source, would have seemed like listening to idle tales. Here was a king of Babylon maintaining a most precarious independence against the monstrous all-devouring empire in the north, a king desperately refusing to see himself beaten, though, perhaps, more cautious counsellors might have advised submission and vassalage as safer. He himself, king of a tiny kingdom, is thought worthy of being sought as an ally against the common foe. Yet he hears of a doom on his race to be executed, not by Nineveh, but by Babylon. Were it not for the Divine promise of deliverance from Assyria, there would have been nothing unreasonable in a declaration that Assyria should possess herself of his treasures and of his sons. Yet it is not the tyrant, it is the fellow victim seeking his aid, for whom this is appointed.

It is the startling seeming improbability which makes the prophecy one of the most wonderful in the Old Testament. Not the shrewdest political foresight could at such a time have grasped such a result, nor would a prophet, who merely sought to pose as a statesmanlike adviser, have risked his credit by

so apparently wild a threat. Happily the king had learnt the power in which his adviser spoke. He does not dispute the truth of the message, he offers no threats to the prophet for his gloomy vaticination, he no longer attempts palliation, he submits, "Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken." This is presumably what the Chronicler (2 Chron. 32. 26) means when he says that Hezekiah "humbled himself for the pride of his heart." His complete acquiescence in the Divine judgment would, we can well believe, modify the course of God's discipline on the house of David. Yet the threat was fulfilled to the letter. Hezekiah's son Manasseh was taken a prisoner to Babylon by Esar-haddon, and Daniel and his companions, who were "of the king's seed" (Dan. 1. 3), were actually eunuchs in Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Hezekiah's own days are allowed to end tranquilly, and the king receives the tidings with a mixture apparently of resignation to God's will as best, and with a feeling of thankfulness that the evil will not come in his day. The latter is perhaps not the noblest aspect of feeling, yet the respite was a mercy which called for infinite thanks.

We may just give a passing glance to the outcome of the embassy. What promises Hezekiah made, what plans were perchance formed, what effect Isaiah's threats had upon the plans, we cannot in the least say. As we have said, if Sennacherib was at this time reigning in Nineveh, Merodach-baladan's struggles had very nearly come to an end. If Sargon were then ruling, it will be remembered that Merodach-baladan's earlier reign coincided more or less with the first twelve years of Sargon's reign; in the last year of the twelve the rebellious vassal underwent a crushing defeat from his suzerain, following upon the capture of Ashdod in the previous year. Whether Ashdod had in any way associated itself with Merodach-baladan in revolt against Nineveh, it is impossible

to say, but it is likely enough. Whether we are to hold that Judah also, as associated with Merodach-baladan, came into collision with Sargon, we shall discuss in the following chapter.

Before, however, proceeding to dwell on the direct history again, we would once more call attention to the prophecy which must have rung in Hezekiah's ears and heart till his dying day. Let it be well remembered that, unless our plainer chronological inferences are wholly and hopelessly at fault, the illness of Hezekiah and the Babylonian embassy fall before the invasion of Sennacherib. Therefore all through the terrors of that awful time, when Sennacherib's Tartan and the great host came against Jerusalem, when the Rab-Shakeh uttered his taunting words, when he told the Jews how his master would deport them to a far-off land, and bid them see in Jehovah nothing more than the gods of Hamath and Arpad, which had fallen,—through all this, through the extremity of anxiety and trouble, there was the knowledge of the further doom, when even Assyria itself should have fallen.

Thus, though the doom to be wrought by Babylon was declared thus early relatively, yet the words must have come with fresh point and insistency when the remnant of the shattered Assyrian army is led away home, never again to return during the twenty remaining years of Sennacherib's reign. Thus Babylon gets a fresh significance in the Jewish mind, and thus may we account for the non-chronological position in Isaiah of the story of the Babylonian embassy. As it now stands, with a higher than a chronological fitness, it introduces as a prelude the promise of delivery from Babylonian captivity, the long drawn gospel message, the truest prototype the ultimate gospel of our Saviour has in the Old Testament, which takes its note from the "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" with which it begins.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FACE TO FACE WITH ASSYRIA.

WHEN once the kingdoms of Damascus and Samaria had been swept away, there could be no doubt that sooner or later the fortunes of the little mountain-kingdom of Judah must come into the supremest peril. The strong fortress of Jerusalem was too important an element to be neglected by an Assyrian king who wished to achieve an invasion of Egypt; it would be full of danger to him, if held by his foes or by disloyal vassals, if his army of invasion were far removed from its base of support. If held by Assyrian troops, it would be of the highest value, if the fates were not propitious, and the Assyrian army had to fall back before an Egyptian one. Ahaz had indeed paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser; Hezekiah had perhaps for a time paid it to his successor, for it seems impossible to say with certainty, who the king of Assyria was of whom it is said that Hezekiah "rebelled against him and served him not" (2 Kings 18. 7).

Possibly Hezekiah paid tribute to Shalmaneser and to Sargon, for, as we shall seek to shew, there is not sufficient evidence to lead us to believe that Sargon ever took any warlike measures against Judah to enforce submission. Yet, be it well remembered, to pay a definite sum of annual tribute, to be in theory a vassal, does not necessarily involve, and certainly in this case did not involve, any degrading interference with national aspirations or national religion. If the



embassy from Merodach-baladan, of which we have already spoken, were in Sargon's reign, then clearly Hezekiah was contemplating the policy of definite revolt; but if so, this must have been checked by Isaiah. A very generally held view is that it was Sennacherib, who, when the tribute was refused, realising that this was not merely veiled disaffection, but open revolt, imposed a heavy fine, which Hezekiah had no option but to pay.

Let us see in the first place what grounds are adduced to shew that an actual attempt was made by Sargon to treat Jerusalem as he had treated Samaria.

Our evidence must be drawn from the Bible and the monuments. We will take the latter first, it being remembered that Sargon's reign is one of those for which our materials are most plentiful.

We have records of the capture of Samaria, of the attack on Tyre, of the capture of Gaza and Ashdod, and of the war with Egypt. Evidently an alliance had been entered into by Ashdod with Egypt, and on the fall of Ashdod, Egypt was glad to beat a retreat. Dr. Schrader\* assigns the campaign against Ashdod to the eleventh year of Sargon's reign (711 B.C., Assyrian reckoning), ten years after the capture of Samaria. It is in connection with this campaign, if at all, that we should look for notices of an attack on Judah and Jerusalem. But, says Dr. Schrader, "neither the annals nor the triumphal inscriptions say anything whatever about a conquest of Judah, . . . nothing as to a disgraceful defeat sustained on this occasion by the Jews."† We are told that in all the extant records of Sargon there is only one reference to a subjugation of Judah. This is in the Nimrûd inscription, the oldest of all of Sargon's inscriptions, brought from the palace of Assurnasir-abal, in which Sargon dwelt in the early part of his reign.

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\* II., 96.

† *Ibid.*, 100.

The passage runs "[Sargon] who subdued the land of Judah, whose situation is remote." \*

Yet this inscription, it would seem, is connected with the warlike events of Sargon's sixth year (716 B.C.), and no mention occurs at all in it of the taking of Ashdod. Clearly, therefore, the reference to Judah must be utterly disconnected from the Ashdod campaign. Nay, in the account of the war against Ashdod there is no mention of a war against Judah.

The only other reference to Judah by Sargon is in the Ashdod inscription. The passage as translated by Professor McCurdy † runs as follows :—

"[The kings] of Philistia, Judah, Edom, Moab, dwellers by the sea, payers of tribute and gifts to Asshur my lord, plotters of sedition, did not refrain from mischief, for in order to stir up rebellion against me they brought gifts of friendship to Pharaoh king of Egypt, a prince who was no saviour to them, and sued with him for an alliance."

There is no statement, however, it will be seen, of a subjugation. What the reference to the "subjugation" of Judah really does mean, it is not so easy to say. Some have suggested that Judah is here used as equivalent for Israel, which, however, is ordinarily called "land of the house of Omri"; but this hardly seems likely. A perhaps more probable view is that Sargon had received the formal submission of Judah on his demand, and had, with true Assyrian arrogance, called this subjugation.

It may thus be fairly held that the monuments give no real support to the theory of an invasion of Judah by Sargon.‡ We turn now to the Bible. Here Sargon is never mentioned save in Isa. 20. 1, where we read how he sent his Tartan or

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\* I., 178.

† *History, Prophecy, and the Monuments*, II., 418.

‡ See McCurdy, II., 246.

general against Ashdod ; and the silence of the monuments on the subject at that point of time we have already dwelt on.

But, it is said by some, twice does the prophet Isaiah dwell on the idea of an Assyrian invasion which, as it cannot be assigned to Sennacherib, must be due to Sargon, Isa. 10. 28-32 and 22. We will take each of these in turn.

As regards chap. 10, it is well to say at the outset that eminent critics are ranged on both sides. Dr. Schrader, who once took the invader of Isa. 10 to be Sargon, now distinctly explains it of Sennacherib.\*

But why should anyone have thought of Sargon at all ? Mainly, it would seem, for two reasons. First, because Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, and Damascus (10. 9, 11), had been captured by Sargon and not Sennacherib. Yet the invader of chap. 10 appears to boast of the conquest as his own. Still, we think, there is no directly *personal* claim made as to that, save in the case of Samaria (v. 11), and even were it otherwise, a boastful Assyrian monarch might well in such a taunt blend his father's victories with his own.

The other matter is more complex. In vv. 28-32, Isaiah depicts the stages of the invader's march, and it is said that the course indicated was not that taken by Sennacherib, and it may be remarked that some of those who entirely repudiate the Sargon theory maintain this. Dr. Schrader holds that Sennacherib did not come against Judah from the north, but "rather infers" that he took the coast road by Accho and Joppa and then turned eastwards. He then explains Isaiah's words as uttered at a time when it was still doubtful which route Sennacherib would take. While his utterance "exhibits an intense dread of the fate awaiting Judah and Jerusalem, it nevertheless presupposes that the Assyrian was still at some distance." The assumption here is that the monuments

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\* II., 76.

indicate Sennacherib's route definitely, and so give us no alternative. Thus not a few have held the description of the march to be "ideal, not actual." It is true that the longest inscription of Sennacherib on this part of his history, that of the Taylor cylinder, of which we shall have much to say in due course, speaks of the campaign against Sidon, and other Phœnician cities, and then speaks of Ashkelon and Ekron.

If this is held to be conclusive there is no more to say. Yet Professor McCurdy, the writer of a recent work of great value on the connected history of Israel and the nations, takes a view which seems to us to reconcile the contending difficulties.

He suggests that such work as was aimed at having been done in Phœnicia, a corps of observation was left behind, and the great army moved on to the south-west, through the plains of Jezreel, once part of the kingdom of Israel, now a peaceable satrapy of the Assyrian Empire. Hereabouts the army was divided; one portion, with which was the king, moved southward along the coast; another marched to the south-east through Samaria into the kingdom of Judah, and wrought a devastation such as Judah had never before experienced. Of this we must speak fully by-and-bye. It is sufficient now to point out that on this view Isaiah's words gain a force of which they are robbed on the other view. The minuteness of the description and the abruptness of the style give a wonderful reality to the outburst, and shew the intense anxiety of the prophet on the watch, as he gives "the itinerary of the enemy's army . . . . as accurately as it was noted in the tablets of the Assyrian general."\* Such a march as this could almost be seen from the walls of Jerusalem, though it must represent but a small fraction of the devastation wrought on this occasion.

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\* See McCurdy, *HL*, 286.

Again, Isa. 22 should plainly be referred to the period when Sennacherib, spite of the heavy fine in money he has accepted, sends his army to Jerusalem and demands its surrender; and of this we shall speak more fully later on.

We thus venture to think that no case of unimpeachable cogency has been shewn for an invasion; all is inference, and, as it seems to us, unnecessary inference. One more suggestion we mention, distinctly to condemn. It is that the name of Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18. 13 and Isa. 36. 1 is an error for Sargon, so that on this hypothesis *vv.* 13-16 refer to the earlier king and the rest of the story to his successor. Clearly if we are to be allowed to alter names at will, anything may be adduced to prove anything.

Thus, we think, we are well within our right in maintaining that the theory of Sargon's invasion of Judah is not proven.

Before entering upon the story of Sennacherib, and of the great deliverance, it is right to say that some scholars, including one whose name must be held in the highest respect, Canon George Rawlinson, hold that there were two distinct invasions by Sennacherib, and that the spoils of the first invasion were carried off to Nineveh, after which, provoked by tidings that Hezekiah was planning to cast off the yoke, he a second time led his army into Palestine. On this view, 2 Kings 18. 13-16 refer to the first invasion, and *vv.* 17 *f.* to the second. It is always a dangerous thing to beard the Douglas in his hold (though here there are Douglasses in both camps), but with the utmost deference to the veteran scholar, we must confess that we fail to be convinced. It is true that the Bible story is quite consistent with the theory that there were two invasions, but it is equally consistent with the view that there was only one, and the inscriptions refer to one only. Nor, as it seems to us, can the difficulty be solved by referring



the one invasion of the inscriptions to the first of two possible ones; for we believe that the cuneiform record, when read in the light of the Bible story of the futile attempt of Sennacherib to seize the Holy City, acquires a fresh and fuller significance. We do not purpose to enter at length into the discussion here, since our grounds for holding the view we do will best be seen in our attempt to shew how the story coheres.

It is important in the first place to state what materials we have on the Assyrian side for the history of the invasion. Our chief source here, as for most students of the subject, is Professor Schrader's monumental work *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*.\* He gives at length the requisite portions of four inscriptions:—(1) The inscription of Constantinople, (2) an inscription on a bas-relief given by Rawlinson, (3) the inscription on the Taylor hexagonal clay cylinder, and (4) the parallel inscription on the Kouyunjik Bulls. He also mentions another important cylinder inscription as yet unpublished.

Of these, by far the most important for our present purpose is the inscription on the Taylor cylinder, which we subjoin at length, arranged in lines, according to Dr. Schrader's translation, which we have compared carefully with that by Prof. McCurdy. To the other inscriptions we shall only refer as far as may be necessary.

The extract begins on column ii., l. 34, of the inscription:—

“In my third campaign, I marched to the land of the Chatti.  
Luli [Elulæus], king of the city of Sidon, the terror of the majesty  
of my dominion overpowered him, and he fled afar  
into the midst of the sea, his land I reduced to subjection.

The city of great Sidon, the city of little Sidon,  
Beth-Zitti, Sarepta, Machallib,

40 Ushu, Ekdippa, Aceho,

his strong towns, the fortresses, the *spots for pasture*.

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\* We cite from the English translation by Professor Whitehouse, of the second enlarged German edition.

- and watering, the stations where his troops were quartered,—the  
exaltation of the arms  
of Asshur my lord had overwhelmed them,—they submitted themselves  
at my feet. Ethobal on the royal throne
- 45 I placed over them, and the offering of tribute to my rule  
I imposed upon him as a yearly fixed payment.  
Menahem of the city of Samsimuruna,  
Ethobal of the city of Sidon,  
Abdili'ti of the city of Arvad,
- 50 Urumilki of the city of Byblos,  
Mitinti of the city of Ashdod,  
Puduil of the land of Beth-Ammon,  
Chemosh-nadab of the land of Moab,  
Malikram of the land of Edom ;
- 55 the collective kings of the Western country,  
the coast-regions together their rich presents and *stores*  
they brought before me and kissed my feet.  
But Zedekiah, king of the city of Ashkelon,  
who had not bowed himself under my yoke,—the gods of his father's  
house, himself,
- 60 his wife, his sons, his daughters, his brothers, the seed of his father's  
house,  
I took away and carried off to Assyria.  
Sarludari, the son of Rukibti, their former king,  
I placed over the people of Ashkelon, the tribute offering  
of subjection to my rule I imposed on him, and he became my vassal.
- 65 In the course of my expedition,—the city of Beth-Dagon,  
the city of Joppa, the city of Bene-Berak, the city of Azuru,  
the cities of Zedekiah, which at my feet  
had not at the proper time submitted, I besieged, I captured, I carried  
off their spoil.
- The *chief officers*, the nobles, the people of Ekron,  
70 who, Padi, their king, who had kept faith and oath  
to Assyria, had cast into iron fetters, and to Hezekiah  
of Judah had delivered, who shut him up in a dungeon—  
their heart was afraid. The kings of Egypt,  
the archers, the chariots, the horses, of the king of Milukhi,
- 75 countless troops they summoned up, and they marched  
to their aid. In view of the city of Altaku  
the battle array was set against me. They summoned  
their troops. Confiding in Asshur my lord,  
I fought with them, and inflicted on them a defeat.
- 80 The commander of the chariots and the sons of the Egyptian king  
together with the commander of the chariots of the king of Milukhi alive

my hand took prisoner in the midst of the battle. The city of Altaku, the city of Timnath, I besieged, and took, and carried off their spoil.

Col. iii.

Against the city of Ekron I advanced ; the chief officers, the great ones, who had made rebellion, I slew ; on stakes round about the city I impaled their corpses. The inhabitants of the town, who had done wickedness and mischief,

- 5 I made captive ; the remainder of them, who had not practised sin and vileness, and whose guilt was not apparent, their pardon I declared. Padi their king, from the midst of Jerusalem I brought forth, and on his throne of sovereignty over them
- 10 I installed him, and the tribute of my suzerainty I imposed upon him. But Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to me, 46 of his fenced cities, and fortresses, and small towns in their neighbourhood without number,
- 15 by casting down the ramparts, and by open attack, by battle . . . hewing to pieces and casting down, I besieged, and took. 200,150 persons, small and great, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep, without number, I brought forth from the midst of them,
- 20 and allotted as spoil. Himself, like a bird in a cage, in Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut up. Fortifications against him I erected, and the exits of the chief gate of his city I barred. His cities which I had plundered, from his land I cut off; and to Mitinti, king of Ashdod,
- 25 Padi, king of Ekron, and Zilbel, king of Gaza, I gave ; so I diminished his land. To the former tribute, their yearly payment, the gifts due to my sovereignty, I added, and imposed it on them. Him, Hezekiah,
- 30 the fear of the majesty of my rule overwhelmed. The Arabians and his faithful subjects, whom for the defence of Jerusalem, his royal city, he had taken in, and to whom he granted payment for hire,\* together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, molten images,
- 35 . . . *large precious stones*, couches of ivory, splendid seats of ivory, elephant hides, ivory, . . . wood, . . . wood, of all kinds, a mighty treasure, his daughters, his palace-women, *his male (and)*

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\* Became seized with panic fear.—McCurdy.

*female servants of the harem*, to Nineveh, my sovereign abode,  
 40 I made him bring. For the payment of the tribute  
 and the performance of homage he despatched his envoy."

The above is the fullest account we possess, from the Assyrian side, of the great campaign. The one or two gaps marked by dots indicate places regarded by most experts as "altogether obscure." Other words, where some uncertainty exists, are italicized. Before proceeding with the story, it may be well to notice what else can be gleaned from Sennacherib's inscriptions as to the history of the campaign.

Of the four which we named, the first two are quite short. In the first there is again a reference to Luli or Elulæus, "king of Sidon," of which title we must hereafter speak, and it is then added, "the extensive territory of the land of Judah, Hezekiah its king, I compelled to obedience." The second is an inscription on a bas-relief, and does not name Hezekiah or Judah, but refers to the conquest of Lachish, and to the offering of its spoil to Sennacherib.

The fourth inscription is parallel with the third, though it is somewhat abridged. There are a few variations also which may deserve notice. In the Taylor cylinder Luli is said to have fled afar "into the midst of the sea," but in the parallel it is to "the island of Cyprus [Jatnan] in the midst of the sea." Sennacherib here asserts that after the reduction of the Phœnician cities, the kings of the west land "presented me with rich gifts before the city of Ushu." \*

Among the kings to whom Sennacherib gave the cities taken from Hezekiah, the king of Ashkelon is added to those who are named in the Taylor cylinder. After the mention of the tribute in talents of silver and gold, there is added "articles of every kind, the treasures of his palace."

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\* This has been identified by Delitzsch with a town in Galilee; see also Neubauer, *Géographie du Talmud*, p. 199; but Schrader dissents,

We may now try to realise the situation just before the breaking of the storm. Sargon had been murdered, not without grave suspicions attaching to his son. In the Assyrian Empire, the death of the monarch was pre-eminently the time when disaffected nationalities might make a desperate rally in the hope of breaking off the hated yoke. Specially would this be the case when so powerful and wise a ruler as Sargon had fallen, and when, perhaps, enough was known as to the character of his successor alike to inspire men with a reasonable hope of success now that the master mind had passed away, and with the intense dread of failure should the new monarch, "boastful, arrogant, cruel, and revengeful, to a degree uncommon even in Assyrian kings," be enabled to work his will on the rebels. While momentarily the bands of authority were perhaps relaxed, there might be a chance of regaining independence.

It is well to keep before our minds at all times that in the Bible we are reading the records of God's providential dealing with one small nationality, overshadowed by mightier neighbours; in the cuneiform inscriptions we are dealing with the annals of a gigantic empire in which Judah was but one of many small tributary nations. It thus becomes of all importance to view our facts in proper perspective. On the one hand, we are fully assured of the certainty of God's guardianship of Israel. On the other, the imperial *fasti* which, with one all-important exception, fairly cover the ground, ought not to be dragged out of shape to fit into the Bible story, *which, from the point of view of the annalist, is distinctly fragmentary.*

It has often proved an unfortunate mistake to see in the Book of Kings a series of national annals, of annalistic exactness, rather than a history with the special purpose of shewing "thus hath God wrought."



The scene of the revolt included various small kingdoms in what we may roughly group together as Palestine, kings of Phœnician cities, kings of Philistine cities, and Hezekiah, king of Judah. As regards the last, the words of the Bible, "he rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not," may, spite of its position in the text before Shalmaneser's attack on Samaria, be referred to this period, though, of course, anything like certainty is impossible. Moreover, as both the Bible and the inscriptions shew that he had interfered in Philistia, and as Sennacherib charged him, doubtless quite truly, with having deposed and imprisoned the loyal Assyrian vassal king of Ekron, we can feel no surprise at Sennacherib's course of action.

Besides this body of disaffected Palestinian kingdoms, two others of a very different type, widely separated one from another, are largely concerned, Babylonia and Egypt. Of the heroic and prolonged resistance of the Babylonian patriot, Merodach-baladan, we have already spoken. Whether his embassy to Hezekiah is to be referred to the very beginning of Sennacherib's reign, or to an earlier date during the reign of Sargon (and for each of these views there is something to be said), we cannot again discuss. Anyhow, we know from the inscriptions that not long after Sennacherib's accession, Merodach-baladan once more made himself master of the throne of Babylon, and that Sennacherib's first important campaign was against rebellious Babylonia, which was brought to obedience with merciless severity. Far away to the west was Egypt. We read in the Bible record of "Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia," and we know how constant had been the intrigues between the Israelite kingdoms and Egypt. The final overthrow of the Northern Kingdom was the outcome of the treasonable correspondence between Hoshea and Sennacherib (the So of the Masoretic text), and how constantly intrigues were

hatched in Jerusalem the pages of Isaiah shew only too well. It will be noticed that Sennacherib speaks \* of the "kings of Egypt," and the "king of Milukhi," this last name representing, according to Dr. Schrader,† "Cush in Upper Egypt." The use of the plural clearly shews that a confederacy of kings had been formed to meet the common danger, and make a stand against the common foe. Tirhakah plainly had succeeded in imposing his will on the rulers of the various Egyptian states, and headed a combination of rulers of the Delta, of Upper Egypt, and of the Sinaitic peninsula, inspired doubtless by the very fact of this unification of Egypt, and the consequent consolidation of its strength. Did any keen patriots among the Egyptians recall the time when an Egyptian king led an army in triumph to the very shores of the Euphrates? Patriot Spaniards nowadays doubtless recall the time when their country was queen of the Indies.

If then the consolidation of Egyptian power under Tirhakah coincided more or less in date with that of Sennacherib's accession, we have everything pointing in one way. Assyria perhaps temporarily weakened by the loss of her great chief, Egypt once more feeling the pulse of a national life beginning to throb, while far away in the east the indomitable Merodach-baladan gathered Chaldæans and Elamites against the hated tyrant. Can it be wondered at that the smaller states thought they saw their chance? Evidently some of the Palestinian kingdoms either kept aloof from the conspiracy, or hastened to submit at the first prospect of danger, as the inscription shews. Ammon and Moab and Edom are merely spoken of as bringing offerings and doing homage, not as undergoing punishment. Ashdod too, evidently had a lively recollection of Sargon's hand ten years before and remained loyal. There were certain Philistine towns, Ashkelon, Ekron, and others,

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\* Taylor cylinder, col. ii. 73, 74.

† I., 289.

which were to feel the weight of their master's hand ; but while it was obviously necessary in view of the hostility of Egypt to have Philistia clear, yet it cannot be doubted that the stress of battle would lie pre-eminently at Tyre and at Jerusalem.

Tyre had held at bay the army of Shalmaneser for five years, in the same invasion which ultimately resulted in the destruction of Samaria. We gather indeed that as early as the first half of the ninth century B.C. both Tyre and Sidon were tributary to Assyria, at any rate the Assyrian records so assert it. Even Sargon, who poses as a deliverer of Tyre from Ionian oppression,\* does not claim to have actually subjugated the city. To pay a tribute, a sort of black-mail as the price for being left alone, is one thing ; to suffer conquest and deportation to a far off land is quite another. Sennacherib, it will have been noticed, makes no mention of Tyre among the Phœnician cities which had been forced to submit. He does indeed mention Luli (Elulæus) as king of Sidon ; but if Sidon were at this time tributary to Tyre, Sennacherib may have gratified his vanity by naming the still unconquered overlord rather than the conquered vassal. There is no possible explanation to be given for this silence save that Tyre baffled all the Great King's efforts. The heroic resistance of the sea-girt city to Sennacherib, as when in later days it held at bay Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great, must inspire the keenest admiration for the race of sailors who defied the monarchs with the armies of the world at their backs. After the lapse of twenty-five centuries, we can but think of their heroism in the same light as that which, fearing nothing, perhaps hoping nothing, inspired the men of Leyden against the forces of Philip II., and the men of Derry against the army of the apostate James.

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\* Schrader, I. 157.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE GREAT INVASION.

WE must suppose it to have been at that season of the year "when kings go forth to battle," in the year which Assyriologists are agreed in fixing as 701 B.C., that the great army of Sennacherib, veterans from many a victorious campaign, marched out, as it must have seemed, to certain conquest. The Assyrian army was too well used to victory in many a hard-fought campaign to entertain the thought of the possibility of a crushing disaster. Forth they marched like the legions of Quintilius Varus which were to subdue the Germans, or like the grand army of Napoleon which invaded Russia in 1812.

They would reach in Northern Syria places which had been permanently crushed by Assyrians; Arpad, for example, had been taken nearly forty years before by Tiglath-pileser, Hamath, which Sargon boasted to have "rooted out," and the like. Sennacherib's vaunt as to the gods of these last two cities is doubtless to be explained of the achievements of his predecessors. Not till the army arrived in Southern Phœnicia was there definite work waiting to be done. Here a certain amount of conquest took place, as the inscriptions tell, but the attempt on Tyre must have failed, just as Shalmaneser's attempt, of which Josephus tells us, failed. A recent writer suggests that the identification of the Assyrian king with Shalmaneser by Josephus is "perhaps a conjecture of his own," but it is dangerous so to read history as to cut out or question any

names that seem awkward. We may well feel assured that to an invading Assyrian army, a virgin fortress would always present itself as an insulting challenge to the supreme power. Sennacherib might well attempt, nay, was practically bound to attempt, what Shalmaneser had essayed before.

With Tyre then alone holding out of the Phœnician cities, and surely that resistance, desperate as it was, must be hopeless in the long run, the invader's policy was clear. He must leave a certain body of troops in Phœnicia to hold the conquered cities and perhaps to carry on the siege of Tyre, unless indeed this had now been raised. This attended to, there were two duties which demanded his thoughts. He must have his line of march clear along the coast route with a view to the fall he must necessarily try with Egypt; he must also, and that finally, make his own the strong mountain fortress of Jerusalem, which, unless held by loyal and friendly hands, might be a source of peril in the rear of an Assyrian army marching southwards. There were indeed certain outlying kingdoms, Ammon and Moab and Edom, but these clearly were not important elements in the scheme of the invader, and they readily accepted their vassalage, as did Ashdod, which knew the might and the cruelty of Assyria too well. Some Philistine towns, and especially Ashkelon and Ekron, were defiant, and these of course must be taken. Their capture would be itself a blow to Judah, which had exercised a very considerable, though varying, influence for some time in the Philistine cities. With Jerusalem his own, and the coast-line clear through Philistia, Sennacherib would hold a strong strategic position against Egypt, and this end must be achieved before the Egyptian army could be ready to move to aid the revolvers. Whatever we may think of Sennacherib personally, it is obvious that among his generals were men who were masters of the art of war and moved unhesitatingly to the desired end.



What was the exact course of events followed after the reduction of Southern Phœnicia is a matter on which it is impossible to speak with certainty. The cuneiform inscriptions confessedly give a story which is incomplete, and doubly so the Bible narrative, in which the whole struggle is viewed not on the side of imperial policy but solely on that of the fortunes of Israel. The cleft between 2 Kings 18. 17 and the preceding context is only to be bridged with exceeding caution. A homely illustration suggests itself in a child's puzzle-map cut up into various shapes for the ingenuity of the owner. Suppose for example such a map of Europe, with a considerable number of the pieces lost, and given to one whose only knowledge of the geography was derived from a brief statement in a book. Should we be surprised if the attempted reconstructions differed widely from each other and from the truth.

We have already said that we see no cogent reason for accepting the theory of two invasions by Sennacherib, though on two distinct occasions in the one campaign Jerusalem was threatened. This view has recently been advocated with great skill and learning by Professor McCurdy. There is rather a wicked old saying, "*Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerint*"; conversely then, one cannot be too grateful to a writer in whom one finds the views we have already taken formulated with a very high degree of skill.

It is assumed then as the most reasonable view that, affairs being settled in Phœnicia, the Assyrian army was broken up into two main divisions, one marching along the coast route to strike at the Philistine cities, and to be ready for the attack on Egypt, the other moving through Galilee and Samaria, across the plain of Jezreel, to crush Judah. They were marching through a country which since the beginning of the reign of Sargon had been incorporated with the Assyrian Empire. The immediate result to Judah is compressed into a very few words

in the Bible story. Sennacherib "came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them." Assuredly there is a vast amount of history, of heroic defence, we may be sure, on the part of the Judæans, of remorseless destruction and disregard of human life and suffering on the part of the Assyrians, condensed into these few words. Sennacherib's own fuller account does but tell us in detail what, from our own knowledge of the Israelites and of the Assyrians, we can fully have imagined—"Forty-six fenced cities and small towns without number." Nor is it left to us merely to surmise that the known resoluteness of the Israelites would force them to resist desperately to the last. The inscription shews that the towns were taken by assault, that devastation went on on every hand, and that over 200,000 captives were deported. No such horrors had Israel seen since the days that they settled in Canaan; hardly worse can they ever have experienced after, under Nebuchadnezzar or Titus, save for the destruction of Jerusalem itself. It is worth mentioning, in the point of view of the extent of the deportation, that on the occasion of the capture of Samaria, Sargon claims to have carried away 27,280 of its inhabitants.\* Here then we have a "captivity" between seven and eight times as large. All this ruin so far is of course of that part of the kingdom north of Jerusalem. The ordeal of the capital is yet to come.

On the view which we believe to be the most probable solution of the complex difficulty, the prophecy of Isa. 10 is to be referred to this period, or rather 10. 5—12. Can we be surprised at any amount of arrogance on the part of a conquering Assyrian king? That nations had gone down before him and his fathers like a row of ninepins was patent to all—Calno and Carchemish, Hamath and Arpad, Damascus and Samaria. Yet these once were thriving and prosperous

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\* Schrader, I, 265.

kingdoms. What of the gods; would they not fight mightily for their votaries against this impious destroyer? With what concentration of scorn does Sennacherib ask "Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim?" Gods and men alike are helpless before the power of Nineveh's king and Asshur his god. As though Kehama telling of the gods he has overthrown, so might Sennacherib say, in the words of a mightier than Sennacherib, and of the gods of a foe mightier than Assyria at her mightiest, "themselves are gone into captivity."

In no wise for one moment does the thought occur that, as with the Chaldæans after him, he was but the rod of God's chastening for the people that, amid the chastisements, was still His ancient flock; that he was but as an axe or a saw or a staff in the hand of the omnipotent wielder. Even though the whole earth had been, as it were, but one huge bird's nest for him, which he pillaged at will, while no bird "flapped its wing, or opened its mouth, or piped," the doom, as for the Chaldæan after him, was for an appointed time; even though in grandeur he might be compared to a vast forest, yet the flame of the Holy One of Israel should destroy it till the few trees left "a child might count." True, he shall work terrible havoc while his time lasts; though the numbers of God's people Israel, now as the sand of the sea, are to be brought very low, yet "a remnant shall return."\*

Nearer comes the foe; after marching through the valley of Jezreel, he would probably pass by or near Samaria, and Shiloh, and Bethel, till the station of Aiath, doubtless the same as the familiar Ai, is reached. The next place named, Migron, is more doubtful. We only meet the name once again, in 1 Sam. 14. 2, from which we see it was near Gibeah of

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\* Heb. *Shear-Jashub*. Note the constant recurrence of the name of Isaiah's son, in which, as in the name of the Virgin's son *Immanu-El*, a whole gospel is stored up.

Saul. Of course this may or may not have been the same as the locality named by Isaiah, a spot on the main road from Ai to Michmash, north of the great ravine of Michmash. The word *Migron* probably means a "precipice," and it is possible, though we think hardly probable, that two different places are indicated. At Michmash, seven miles from Jerusalem, the heavy baggage is deposited, but the army moves on through the ravine, and halts for the night at Geba. The terror, the despairing flight, the havoc, we are left to ourselves to imagine; the shriek of each horror-stricken village echoing to its neighbour; shrilly does Beth-Gallim raise its voice, Anathoth raises an answering wail. Even in this supreme moment, the Hebrew prophet does not disdain the *paronomasia* his language so much affects. The foe is very near now; he is at Nob, plainly visible from the walls of Jerusalem. Just the one day's halt at Nob, once the scene of a cruel slaughter, now enduring vastly worse terrors. The leader shakes his hand threateningly at the walls of the defiant capital, at the Mount of Zion.

Let us forget just for one moment Isaiah, the Divinely inspired prophet, and think of him as a patriot of the keenest patriotism in this hour of supremest peril. However firmly fixed his faith on the ultimate deliverance, however fully he recognised the certainty of the Divine influence shaping his message, yet it must have been a cruel grief to him to know the sufferings his countrymen were certainly enduring, to see probably the smoke of burning villages on the northern horizon. Yes, and humanity too is weak. How can we tell whether anxious doubts did not at times flash across his mind, when even St. John the Baptist needed to send for confirmation of the message himself had taught.

When and under what circumstances a respite was first given, we cannot say. Hezekiah, anyhow, sees that submission

in the first instance is inevitable. The Bible and the monuments are at one here. The former tells us that a message is sent by Hezekiah to Sennacherib, then with the other division of his army at Lachish, declaring his submission :— “ I have sinned, return from me ; whatsoever thou wilt impose upon me, I will bear.” Needless to say, no Shylock was ever more determined to get the full amount of his requirements one whit than an Assyrian king. He imposes the tribute, or rather the fine, of 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold (2 Kings 18. 14). Clearly a rebellious vassal owed not merely his tribute, but a further heavy payment to the suzerain who was so mercifully overlooking his disaffection. It will have been noticed that in the Assyrian story, Sennacherib represents himself as receiving, besides various miscellaneous treasures, “ 30 talents of gold and *eight* hundred talents of silver.” Of course in differences in numbers we can often do little more than note the difference. It is an interesting point, however, that it is conjectured by some scholars that the Hebrew and Phœnician silver talent stood in value to the Babylonian in the ratio of eight to three.\* On this view the two narratives would agree exactly, the number of the talents of gold being alike in each. It is of course, however, possible that there is some exaggeration in the Assyrian numbering, or Sennacherib may be reckoning up all the silver wrung from Judah throughout the campaign.

One point more ; the cuneiform inscription actually states that Sennacherib received, not merely claimed, this enormous fine. He therefore accepted Hezekiah's submission, and condoned the offence. Judæa wasted, the treasury emptied, the Temple stripped to raise the demand, with the iron entering into the very soul of a proud race, what gleam of brightness

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\* McCurdy, II., 427.



was there? This only, that they had escaped by the very skin of their teeth.

It evidently was a difficult matter to raise the required amount. Ahaz had exhausted the treasures stored up by his prosperous father and grandfather to win the dangerous support of Tiglath-pileser, and probably the tremendous outlay had never been made good. Assyria's protection is not lightly to be bought. Hezekiah had overlaid the doors and the pillars of the Temple with gold, but all this, his own work, had to be sacrificed to the rapacity of Asshur. To kings of Judah, the treasures and rich decorations of the Temple must have seemed a reserve fund for national emergencies, as we find also in the case of Joash and of Ahaz, and even of Asa. It will be noticed that in the English Bible the word "gold" is italicised, as not in the Hebrew, yet it cannot be doubted that the interpretation is correct. The word rendered "overlaid" is used elsewhere in the Bible (as in *Exod.* 25. 11) of overlaying with gold, and indeed so comparatively inferior a metal as silver is not to be thought of in this connection.

Let us now consider the fortunes of the other division of the Assyrian army, with which was the king. Its immediate business is to crush the recalcitrant Philistine cities, and, if possible, before an Egyptian army could arrive on the scene. In the old days of Saul and David, Philistia seems to have been a sort of Pentapolis, but only three of the five are mentioned in Sennacherib's inscription, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron; the first, like a burnt child dreading the fire, simply as paying tribute, the other two defying the arbitrament of war. Whether the two sieges went on concurrently the inscription does not state; but considering the vast size of an Assyrian army, and the importance of sweeping the board as speedily as possible, it seems probable that they did. The distance was not great, and communications could easily be maintained.

Each of these cities would have a number of small dependent towns, which would share their fate. But besides these two was a third town, which certainly was an important element in the campaign, Lachish, which somehow is not mentioned in Sennacherib's inscription. We have referred, however, in the preceding chapter to the bas-relief, in which Sennacherib is represented as receiving the spoil of Lachish. Moreover, in the Bible story, the siege of Lachish stands out definitely. To all readers who have at all interested themselves in the results of recent discovery, the name of Lachish awakens an interest which can only be called romantic. An Egyptian woman digs up in a mound in Upper Egypt clay tablets with letters believed to be of the fifteenth century B.C. One of these is from Zimrida, governor of Lachish.\* No sooner were these given to the world, than from a mound which Dr. Petrie had shewn to be the site of the ancient Lachish, Mr. Bliss discovered, deep down below the surface, a cuneiform tablet with the name of the same governor occurring on it more than once. When Sennacherib's troops encircled Lachish twenty-six centuries ago, that tablet had already been buried some seven or eight hundred years. It is then round Ashkelon and Ekron and Lachish that the interest of this act of the drama circles. Of the internal history of the last at this date we cannot speak, but it is clear that, in the other two, pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian factions faced each other. Ashkelon was, it would seem, the first to fall, if we may judge from the sequence of events in the inscription (*see* col. ii. 58 ; iii. 1). Its rebel king Zedekiah is carried off to Nineveh, with his wife and his family and his gods; and Sarhadari, the son of the former king, is set up as a vassal of Assyria in his place.

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\* Zimrida of Lachish is also mentioned in a letter from Jerusalem. (Conder, *The Tell Amarna Tablets*, p. 146.)

In Ekron the internal divisions had resulted in downright revolution. The king Padi, who remained loyal to Assyria, was overthrown by the opposing faction, apparently acting in concert with Hezekiah, by whom Padi was imprisoned in a dungeon in Jerusalem.

If the record of the Taylor cylinder be referred to, it will be seen (col. ii. 69 *f.*) that the story of the Ekronite rebellion is told, and the alarm which Sennacherib's approach excited. At this stage we learn of the arrival of the Egyptian forces, and of the battle between the Assyrians and Egyptians at Altaku (Eltekeh). Here Sennacherib claims (col. iii. 78 *f.*) to have gained a complete victory, and after a mention of the capture of Eltekeh and Timnath, the story of the siege of Ekron is resumed. This naturally suggests that the Egyptians must have aimed at interposing before Ekron fell.

Here a further light is gleaned from the Bible. When the Rab-Shakeh returned to his master from Jerusalem he found (2 Kings 19. 8) that he had departed from Lachish, that is, presumably, Lachish had just been taken. At this juncture he hears of the advance of Tirhakah and his Egyptians.

The events which next ensued are not dwelt on at all in the Bible, but there seems no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the inscription. Lachish has fallen, Judah has submitted and has been heavily mulcted, the siege of Ekron has just been started, the king himself has begun the siege of Libnah. On the news of the approach of the Egyptian army, it is obvious that it would be imperative to re-unite the scattered forces, and we may take for granted that the Assyrian array at Eltekeh would include both the forces massed against Ekron, and the troops under the king's own command at Libnah.

Assyrian kings are apt to make the most of their victories, and doubtless the court annalist would always feel bound to tone down or to omit anything like disaster, but we cannot

doubt that the victory of the Assyrians at Eltekeh, whatever losses they incurred, was in its broad results sufficiently decisive. Thus, to say nothing of the capture of little towns like Eltekeh and Timnath, the king returns to Ekron after the battle, and the town once taken is punished with sharp severity. Woe to the rebel against Assyria, when his master lays him low. Not even Rome at her bloodiest can compare with Nineveh. But not only is no effort made by the Egyptians to intervene in the struggle in Philistia, but we do not find that Tirhakah shews any inclination to meddle in international politics for a long time. The most telling fact of all is that there is clear evidence, coming indeed indirectly from an Egyptian source, that the army of Sennacherib penetrated as far south as Pelusium, the very key to the possession of Egypt. Of this we must speak by-and-bye.

We do not mean it to be supposed that the sequence of events we have here sketched is that which the statements of the Bible and the monuments necessarily lead us to, but merely that it is the one which most commends itself to our mind as the natural one. Different scholars group the facts in widely different ways. Thus it has been suggested that Sennacherib marches along the coast route with his whole army, defeats the Egyptians at Eltekeh, and then sends a detachment for the investment of Jerusalem. He himself remains in the southern part of the Shephelah or low country to besiege Lachish and Libnah, and so secure a perfectly untrammelled way into Egypt. It was at Lachish that he received Hezekiah's tribute, but for all that he sends from Lachish and Libnah two demands for the surrender of Jerusalem.\* It was at

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\* This is the view taken by Dr. G. A. Smith in his well-known and valuable *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 236, and it is one deserving of careful attention, but it is impossible to enter into a minute discussion of the relative probabilities while our knowledge of essential facts is so imperfect. The impossibility of ruling with anything like certainty as to the reference of Isa. 10 makes it desirable to hold our judgment somewhat in abeyance.

this juncture, when things were at their darkest, that deliverance came ; but here the two views converge.

We must now return to speak of Jerusalem. The indemnity had been paid, however hard the effort, the relation of vassal and suzerain had been re-established, and presumably the Assyrian troops withdrawn from Judæan territory, and a breathing space thus given. Yet with all Hezekiah's treasure stored up by him in the camp round Lachish, Sennacherib, spite of his implied promise, hankered keenly after the possession of Jerusalem. When the strong man armed has persuaded himself, justly or unjustly, that the possession of this or that thing is necessary for his well-being, the weaker has little choice, unless a stronger one intervene. He has but, like Brennus, to throw his sword into the scale. It was easy to argue, I have indeed accepted their tribute, but forgiveness on my part implies loyalty on theirs. Doubtless they are intriguing once again with Egypt, and will strive to be a thorn in my side when the clash of arms comes between Egypt and Assyria. It has, indeed, been suggested that the Rab-Shakeh's words (2 Kings 18. 21, 24) hint at the possession of information by the Assyrian that there actually had been such intriguing. This, however, is of course but surmise. It is very probable that Isa. 33 is to be referred to this period, and an increased point is given even to that wonderfully eloquent and passionate outburst in the light of the above facts :—  
"Thou that dealest treacherously, though they dealt not treacherously with thee," "He hath despised the covenant," and the like, bringing out the unfair treatment Jerusalem is experiencing. Yet amid the blackness, Isaiah's confident promises shew no sign of wavering ; Jerusalem shall be as a tabernacle, which shall not be taken down, none of its stakes shall be removed or its cords broken. Jehovah is their Judge, their Lawgiver, their King ; He will save them.



An Assyrian army, a "great host," is sent up against Jerusalem, and the southern part of the kingdom of Judah, which had perhaps escaped injury at the first, now endured the horrors of devastation. Of the state of things in Jerusalem itself, we have, we cannot doubt, a picture, and that one of startling vividness, in Isa. 22. Into the local difficulties of that chapter it is not our province to enter. As for the theory that seeks to refer the chapter to a supposed invasion of Judah by Sargon, we have already given reasons for thinking that no such invasion ever took place.\* Any discussion of the question as to whether vv. 1-7 refer to Jerusalem or Samaria, to an Assyrian or a Chaldaean siege, is entirely outside our province. We confess that there seems to us no valid reason why, in our present knowledge of facts, the whole chapter should not be referred to the period of the siege by Sennacherib. It would, perhaps, be more correct to say that the prophecy is delivered on the eve of the siege, when the growling of the thunder shews the storm drawing certainly nearer, though not immediately at hand. It will be noted that the doom pronounced on Shebna in this chapter seems to have found a partial fulfilment in the story told in Kings, in that there he is no longer "Lord Steward of the Palace," but merely holds the inferior post of scribe.

The prophet himself, we may be sure, with nerves strung to their intensest pitch now that the crisis has indeed come, sees the hosts of the Great King and their vast numbers, the choicest valleys filled with chariots and horsemen. He looks within the city, he sees wild excitement and panic, crowds upon the housetops staring in open-eyed terror at the appalling sight of the foes; many of the nobles, it would seem, had fled, like the émigrés in the first French revolution, instead of rallying to fight to the last. Divided counsels surely were rife

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\* See on this point Schrader, *in loco*. II., 99.

in that "day of perplexity"; and if, as we believe, this siege falls in time before the battle of Eltekeh, the Egyptian faction may have pressed their senseless advice to lean on what was a broken reed. In the extremity of need, some in utter blindness to the danger, some in reckless despair, plunge into mad revelry. Who does not remember the vivid and ghastly picture De Foe draws of scenes of wild feasting in London amid the horrors of the Great Plague? So it was in Jerusalem, the cry was "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Attempts had indeed been made, though at what exact point of time it is impossible to say, to strengthen the defences. Houses were pulled down for the repairs of the fortifications, a reservoir provided for the storage of water, yet so far as the body of the people are concerned, there is no looking to their God, no thought of turning to Him with weeping and mourning, that even yet He might deliver. "Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine."

When Isaiah has thus plainly set forth his message, he turns with terrible suddenness on the false and dangerous adviser Shebna with an address of fiery invective, wrath and scorn commingled. This foreigner, for so the form of his name would suggest that he was, has, as though sprung from the ancient princes of the land, hewn him out a sepulchre in the rock. As a man throws a ball in a wide open space, so will the LORD hurl him from his place, and a worthier shall occupy it. This successor is honoured by the words "the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open." These words, it will be remembered, are used by the Saviour of Himself in the opening of the letter to the Church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3. 7), so that Eliakim, "God will establish," is shewn us as a type of Christ.

We have spoken in an earlier chapter of the great work of Hezekiah in connection with the water-supply of Jerusalem. This provided reservoirs for the overflow, so as to utilize the store to the full and to keep it out of the reach of the besiegers, and with the numerous breaches in the walls repaired, there might be a hope, not indeed of indefinite resistance to the Assyrians, but till the Egyptian army, then on the march, might grapple with the foe. Jerusalem if still untaken might prove a weighty aid to the Egyptians by detaining one or more corps d'armée to watch the unconquered fortress.

The historian brings us at once into the heart of the matter :—"The king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-Saris and Rab-Shakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem." The general political aspect, as seen by the Assyrians, was nothing to the sacred writer : his sole concern is to trace the working of God's Providence. Before proceeding with the story, it will be well to explain that in the three names mentioned above, we have not personal names, but titles, which in the ears of a foreign people might well be confused with them. So the Romans thought that Brennus was the king of the Gauls, when it is but the Celtic word for king. The Tartan (*see also* Isa. 20. 1) was the commander-in-chief. The pronunciation of the word in Assyrian is, according to Dr. Schrader, Tur-ta-m, and it is doubtless not a Shemitic word, but borrowed from the old pre-Shemitic Chaldaean tongue. Rab-Saris, if viewed as Hebrew, would, though somewhat irregular, mean "chief of the eunuchs," and Dr. Schrader thinks it is "probably the translation of a corresponding Assyrian title." Yet one cannot help thinking that the Jewish ears would catch the sound of the title or name of this officer, rather than the meaning of words in a language which few, if any of them, would know. Another solution is to render it "chief of heads," as though a lieutenant-general.

The officer to whom falls the duty of communicating with the besieged city is the Rab-Shakeh. If this name were Hebrew, it would be a somewhat irregular way of speaking of "chief cupbearer," a rather unlikely person, one would feel, to be the chief actor in such a scene. We cannot doubt, however, that we have but the Hebraized form of the native name, in which the Jews, like other people, sought to read sense into the word. The title Rab-Shak is said to mean chief commander, *shak* alone occurring in the plural with the meaning "officers." Thus the commander-in-chief has with him a chief of the eunuchs—for his literary qualifications, Dr. Schrader suggests—and also what we might call the chief of the staff. It is on this last that the discussion devolves. It would, we may suppose, be beneath the dignity of the Tartan so to act, and the eunuch would have been less suitable for the purpose than the military officer. Or, of course, it is possible, as Canon Rawlinson suggests, that the Rab-Shakeh alone of the three could speak Hebrew, and Dean Milman put forward the idea that he was perhaps a renegade Jew; but this hardly seems likely, some note of such a fact would surely have been added.

The scene is one of the most dramatic which a historian ever penned. The Assyrian troops, whether an actual army intended for the definite investment and destruction of Jerusalem, or, as is more probable, simply a very large escort for the officers, sufficient to impress the people of Jerusalem with an overwhelming sense of the might of the empire, are massed plainly in view from the walls. The walls, we can well believe, are crowded, in every coign of vantage, with a dense mass of eager spectators. How curiously feelings must have been blended in that throng gazing intently from the ramparts. Doubtless even at such a juncture, intense curiosity was a powerful motive in the mind of many. How largely, even at supreme crises in history, curiosity is a powerful factor in men's

feelings is shewn by what Kinglake tells, how that during the battle of the Alma the walls of Sebastopol were crowded by the townspeople, men and women of all ranks ; but this was to see the English and French armies driven into the sea. If we are right in the view we have taken of the interpretation of Isa. 10, Sennacherib's army had approached within a day's march of the capital, but now the Assyrian officers are within speaking distance of the walls of Jerusalem. The place is one made memorable for us, as that where the great promise of deliverance is given by Isaiah to Ahaz at God's command—"by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field." There can be no reasonable doubt that this was on the north side of the city, as no other side would be accessible for a "great host."

But with curiosity, other and deeper feelings must have commingled ; burning indignation to see the aliens crowding on the soil which the Israelite loved with so keen an affection, impotent rage at the thought that nothing could be done to avenge the insult, fear, deep down in the heart, the grim feeling "and after all."

The trio of Assyrian officers summon the king to an audience : to these high officials the king of this petty little kingdom, now it would seem tottering to its fall, would be a person with whom no great ceremony was necessary. But to this, Hezekiah, descendant of a long line of kings, taught to believe that the "house of David" was one honoured by the special blessing of Jehovah, declines to submit. Thus to the three Assyrians, three Hebrews are sent out. Eliakim, "which was over the household," virtually the chief minister of the crown, Shebna, who had held that office, but had now been deposed from it, and held the subordinate position of scribe or secretary, and Joah the recorder. On Eliakim devolves the main duty of carrying on the conference. The manner in which he is



spoken of in Isa. 22 shews plainly the character of the man. God calls him "My servant," he is to be "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah," he is to be "a glorious throne to his father's house."

The parley is begun by the Rab-Shakeh. His speech is skilfully planned for the object in view. Clearly it will be convenient for the Assyrians, if by any means, persuasion, argument, intimidation, the Jews can be brought to surrender their city, and so save the delay and the waste attendant on a siege. Thus it is plainly his wisdom to stir up discord in the minds of the Jews, to point out the hopelessness of the struggle, the reasonable way in which they will be treated if they surrender. Where can they look for help? Is it to Egypt? But Egypt was, and the wiser Israelites knew it, no real help in time of need; when the stress came, the pretended friendship proved useless. Is it to their God Jehovah they look? Surely that also is vain. A deity whose altars Hezekiah has destroyed is likely to be a foe rather than a friend. It will be noticed throughout both the Rab-Shakeh's speeches that he is steadily endeavouring to belittle the king in the eyes of his subjects. His own master is always "the Great King, the king of Assyria": to Hezekiah no title of courtesy is ever given; he is just Hezekiah, that and no more. Further appeal takes the form of one to the people as against Hezekiah. He trusts in Egypt like a madman, he has pulled down the altars of the national God. Do not let him deceive you. Harken not to him. The climax of the first speech is reached when the Rab-Shakeh claims in his master's name, that Jehovah Himself commanded him, "go up against this land and destroy it," a reckless assertion, which, false as it was, might perhaps shake some minds. The allusion to the 2,000 horses is of course a sneer at the helplessness of Judah. The Assyrian army was strong in countless hosts of cavalry, and Judah

looked longingly to Egypt, whose chariots and horsemen were many—but as for themselves, even if Sennacherib gave them 2,000 horses, they could find no riders to mount them. Yet the king of such a people would defy the master of millions. He could not drive back one mere general of division, “one of the least of the captains,” and yet he would defy the king with the whole Assyrian army at his back.

With the object in view that he has, the Rab-Shakeh speaks in Hebrew. In a vast army like the Assyrian, holding in check so heterogeneous an empire, it was an obvious need to have various officials who could communicate with various subject nations in their own language, dictate terms to the conquered, arrange tribute with vassals, and the like.

The hope was that by crafty arguments disaffection could be created in the city, and on the crest of a wave of revolt against Hezekiah, the Assyrian host would obtain the fortress at no great cost. It would seem as if there was something in this hope, and that signs of approval were shewn by some of the people on the wall, by the evident anxiety of the three Hebrew officers to have the rest of the discussion in the Syriac, or Aramæan, language.

Whatever wisdom the Rab-Shakeh may have seen in his plan of speaking Hebrew to begin with, must have commended itself doubly to him now. The bow he had drawn at a venture had clearly struck home, and he insists strongly that it is to the men on the wall, the mass of the common people, and not to the king and the court officials, that his message is sent. It is on the former that all the horrors of a siege would fall; it is they, therefore, who should have some voice in the settling of the nation's fortunes now.

The Rab-Shakeh's first speech was professedly addressed to the king, “speak ye now to Hezekiah”; in his second speech he casts aside the last rag of international comity and

directly addresses the people, common soldiers and the miscellaneous mob on the wall, speaking to them loudly in Hebrew. The double thought running through the second speech is as before; he seeks to sow seeds of distrust in Hezekiah, he dwells on the uselessness of resistance to Assyria. It will be noticed that he again lays stress on the futility of trust in Jehovah: "Let not Hezekiah make you trust in Jehovah, saying, Jehovah will surely deliver us." One would be inclined to fancy that Hezekiah must have endeavoured to inspire his people with confidence by urging on them some of Isaiah's declarations of deliverance, and this fact of a Jewish reliance in their God may well have been known, perhaps by means of spies, to the Assyrian officers. He reminds them, too, of facts which were patent enough; various strong cities had fallen before the Assyrian arms—Hamath, Arpad, and the like. Yet it is to be presumed that the gods of these cities would have saved them if they could. What reason is there to suppose that Jehovah could achieve more than they? Indeed, both the Rab-Shakeh and the men of Jerusalem knew that the northern tribes of Israel, men nearakin to those now addressed, had been crushed and led into captivity by Sargon. The only course for sensible men is unconditional submission. Make peace at once, paying the ordinary present on such an occasion, and before long you shall be removed to a fertile land, where you shall live and not die.

Such was the message. "But the people held their peace and answered him not a word." Evidently whatever feelings of discontent there may have been with some few of the people, there were not sufficient materials to lead to any hope of a seditious outbreak, in which case the Assyrian troops present might suffice to effect a capture. The chance now was that the king, on whose somewhat emotional temperament the strain would doubtless tell heavily, might in sheer despair of a rift

in the clouds surrender the city. To him the three officials, with clothes rent in token of deep sorrow and of horror at the Rab-Shakeh's blasphemy, betake themselves.

The very sight of the three messengers must have told the king all. The familiar external signs of mourning, the dejection and terror on their faces, would not need many words for the setting forth of the Assyrian demand. Absolute surrender, the end of all hope that there should never fail a son of David to sit on David's throne, the absorption of the little kingdom and of all aspirations for the future in the all-devouring maw of Assyria, lost like the stone sinks in the sea—or what else? What but that Sennacherib, having taken Lachish by storm, would lead on to Jerusalem his whole army, and wreak on the defiant city such vengeance as Assyria knew too well how to exact. What could Hezekiah in such a case expect for himself? What but such treatment as Nabu-usabsi, king of Bet-Silan, had received at the hands of Tiglath-pileser, who impaled him before the gate of his own city, and such as the rebel chiefs of Ekron had received at the hands of Sennacherib himself.

He has no hope left unless God will protect him. His faith is strained to the utmost, yet clearly he has not cast it off. He sends his three officers to Isaiah to urge him to implore for help; perhaps God may the more readily listen to the servant who has so consistently, through good repute and ill repute, been true to his faith. But he does not do this alone; covered in sackcloth, in token of deepest humiliation, he went into the Temple; it may be that even now, in this supreme crisis, Jehovah will prove Himself mighty to save. So may the prayers that went up from English hearts in two awful moments of England's peril, have won the help by which our fathers crushed the Armada, or by which they triumphed at Trafalgar.

The message is an urgent one. Unless some encouragement can be given, what is there but black despair, unless God should avenge upon the Assyrians their blasphemy? There is but a remnant now of His ancient people to receive His help; all but the little kingdom of Judah is gone past recall. The messengers clad in sackcloth stand before Isaiah, but no need for them to urge their plea. The Divine message awaited them. Hezekiah was not the first, nor the last, to know how true the promise, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." The message for Hezekiah is "Be not afraid." What more could he ask for from such a quarter? Yet more is told him. The tyrant king is to hear news which shall strike him with terror, leading him to return to his own land, and there shall he, by whom so much blood had been spilt, die a bloody death. The promise, it will be observed, says nothing as to the time of the deliverance; the promise is enough for man, the time is God's. As a matter of fact, much had yet to happen before upon the strong man armed came the stronger—the battle with the Egyptians at Eltekeh, the capture of Ekron, and a further move of the Assyrian army southwards. Sennacherib himself survived for twenty years before he was murdered by two of his sons.

In reliance on the promise, the Rab-Shakeh's demand is refused, and apparently the Assyrian forces are not sufficient to undertake a complete siege. Probably the Assyrian leaders expected that the sight of the Assyrian soldiery and the stern demand would suffice, especially if aided by disaffection within.

For the time the pressure was removed, the most careless and faithless could breathe again when the invaders departed (unless, indeed, a small corps of observation were left); those whose faith was more deeply rooted could cling to the thought of the "Be not afraid." There was another fiery trial yet



for Hezekiah and his people ; but if God's promise given through Isaiah was to be trusted at all, then clearly the whole trouble was bridged over. Certainly Hezekiah's next recorded words, his prayer when he received the Assyrian letter, testify to a different feeling to the half despair breathing through his message to Isaiah.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE GREAT DELIVERANCE.

WHETHER part of the Assyrian troops were left behind to check Jewish action, we cannot say ; in any case it is clear that most of them would be recalled to the main body of the army in view of the imminent struggle with a more imperial foe. The Rab-Shakeh and his colleagues rejoin their master in front of Libnah, Lachish having now been taken by storm. As we have already said, though this capture is not mentioned on the Taylor cylinder, or in the parallel inscription on the Kouyunjik Bulls, there is a bas-relief which pictures the reception of the spoil of captured Lachish by the triumphant Assyrian king. The exact position of Libnah is unknown to us, but it was probably in the immediate neighbourhood of Lachish, so that Sennacherib's army, then stationed on the road between Palestine and Egypt, was in a very suitable position for awaiting the onset of the Egyptians.

The question as to the true sequence of events at the stage which we have now reached is a very obscure one, as indeed may be seen by the wide diversity of the solutions put forward by commentators. The rough outline of the facts given by the Bible story is plain enough (2 Kings 19. 8 *f.*) ; but then the Bible story was not designed to give a political sketch, but simply the workings of Providence for Israel. The facts before us, so far that is as we glean them from the Bible, are that the Rab-Shakeh rejoined Sennacherib before Libnah, and that then came the news of the advance of Tirhakah, king

of Ethiopia. The result of the tidings is the renewal of the demand for the surrender of Jerusalem. The refusal to comply with the demand is implied but not stated, and the Divine promise of protection is uttered through Isaiah in unmistakable terms. Then comes the fulfilment of the promise: "it came to pass in that night." The Hebrew is unequivocal as to the time of the Divine intervention, but says nothing as to where it befell, and accordingly widely differing views are put forward.

One initial dispute must be whether Tirhakah was actually the defeated leader at the battle of Eltekeh, or whether the kings there defeated were merely his vassals or allies, and his march forward mentioned by the Bible was a further movement, perhaps intended to retrieve the former defeat. It will be found that no hypothesis is free from difficulty, and this difficulty is augmented by the strange incompleteness of the record as told in the Assyrian inscriptions, where anyhow there is clearly a chapter untold, and by the further curious fact that there is no mention whatsoever of the name of Tirhakah therein.

We shall first indicate the view taken by Dr. Schrader. Sennacherib halts near Lachish to await the Egyptians, not liking to move southwards too far from his base, as long as Ekron and Jerusalem were in hostile hands in his rear. On the approach of the Egyptian army, however, the king and his generals seem to have thought that a position further north would be more advantageous, and he accordingly falls back to Eltekeh (Altaku) near Ekron. A reference to the inscription on the Taylor cylinder, cited in a preceding chapter, shews that the Assyrians claimed the victory, though, considering the usual boastful style of their inscriptions, the assertions are more moderate than usual. That it was in some sort a victory, the mention of the capture of the Egyptian princes may be allowed

to prove. Yet, adds Dr. Schrader, "if it was actually a victory, it was at all events . . . a Pyrrhus victory." There is no statement of the number of prisoners taken, or of the chariots captured as trophies, or the like, and certainly Assyrian inscriptions do not ordinarily err on the side of reticence. Thus, it is held, while it was possible to take Ekron and to sack Timnath, it was not possible to take the offensive against Egypt, or to force Jerusalem to surrender. On this view it is assumed that, though Tirhakah's name does not occur in Sennacherib's inscriptions, he is to be identified with the "King of Milukhi," whose archers, chariots, and horses, are expressly referred to. It may be noted here that Tirhakah is mentioned by name by Asshur-bani-pal, the grandson of Sennacherib, as one whom his father Esar-haddon had defeated, and as the object of his own first campaign.

Yet this grouping of the facts is hedged about with difficulties. If we are to assume that when the last summons was made to Jerusalem, the battle of Eltekeh had not been fought, then, whether the Divine destruction smote the division of the Assyrian army which had come to threaten Jerusalem, or the main body with the king, leading in either case to a speedy return to Nineveh, we may well ask how, after this appalling disaster, we are to fit in the battle of Eltekeh and capture of Ekron; to which may be added that in the story as told by Herodotus, of which we must speak presently, we have an actual invasion of Egypt, a statement confirmed by an inscription of Esar-haddon's referring to an Arabian campaign of Sennacherib. To Dr. Schrader the difficulty does not seem to make any matter, for he dismisses the Biblical account of the catastrophe with the remark on 2 Kings 19. 35: "The Assyrian inscriptions shed no light on this obscure passage. Sennacherib in his inscription is altogether silent about the character of the retreat and its causes."

Nor, on the other hand, are matters simpler if we assume that the battle of Eltekeh preceded the last summons to Jerusalem and that Tirhakah was the suzerain or ally of the Egyptian kings there routed, since in that case Sennacherib must have postdated his reference to Hezekiah in the inscription, as though the devastation of Judah, and the paying of tribute by Hezekiah were the concluding scenes of the drama, instead of among the opening ones. In this case we introduce difficulties of another kind. We should thus have an onward march recorded in the Bible of Tirhakah, which, save for the Bible notice, is an absolute blank in history; and still the problem remains as to how the story told by Herodotus is to be fitted in, if we take as fixed the Bible statement of the date of the catastrophe. The story told by Herodotus (ii. 141) will be cited at length presently. We may also note that the inscription of Esar-haddon above referred to, states that Hazael, an Arabian king whose city had been taken by Sennacherib, pleaded for the restoration of his ancestral gods. Clearly then, room must be found for this Arabian campaign.

Waiving then the difficulty arising from the note of time, we are forced to suppose on this view a forward movement into Arabia and Egypt (unrecorded in Sennacherib's annals), one last attempt being made to bully Hezekiah into surrender. By this time somehow Sennacherib has reached Pelusium and there the blow falls, and the remnants of the great army make their way back terror stricken to Nineveh. We shall defer for the present any comments on the miraculous deliverance, and shift the scene once again to Jerusalem and the reception of the message, leaving the intricacies of the story as incapable of being solved in our present imperfect knowledge of the facts.

It is clear from the Bible that it was the news of the advance of Tirhakah which led Sennacherib once more to send



a demand for the surrender of Jerusalem. With the assailing force daily drawing nearer, he could not afford to fritter his strength by commencing a siege, or even detaching any large body to watch the city. On the other hand, considering the nature of the struggle that was imminent, with an invasion of Egypt as its objective, the question as to whose hands should hold so strong a fortress as Jerusalem, so dangerously near the line of communications of the Assyrian army if matters did not run with perfect smoothness, was one which would come home very keenly to the hardheaded soldiers who led this great army. Perhaps but for Tirhakah's forward movement at this juncture, Sennacherib might have led his main army against Jerusalem. In such a case, humanly speaking, its fall must have been inevitable. Yet "God fulfils Himself in many ways." The end Providence has willed is attained, and it is vain to ask, how if it had not been so? It is a waste of labour, to try to write a history of things which might have happened, to ask what would have been the result had, for instance, the soldiers on the Spanish Armada effected a landing in England, or if Villeneuve had succeeded in evading Nelson on the ocean race, or the like. Surely by the directest mercy of God, the great perils were averted, and men must say "Truly there is a God that judgeth the earth." So too, Tirhakah advanced and Sennacherib dares do no more than threaten Jerusalem.

This time the message comes in written form, a letter which Hezekiah reads, perhaps a clay tablet such as those unearthed at Tel el-Amarna. The letter is presumably written in Hebrew since Hezekiah can read it, and the narrative has shewn us that there was, at any rate, one Assyrian official versed in Hebrew. The letter is outspoken; it dwells on patent facts, not a single kingdom has withstood the Assyrian army. Against that the gods have been shewn to be powerless.

Why should the God of Jerusalem be more successful than they? Just as in the speech of the Rab-Shakeh the purpose is clear—he seeks to instil in the people's mind a distrust of their king, thus driving in a wedge which may create a rift—so in the letter. If he can inspire Hezekiah with distrust of his God, he has no other possible resource. His trust in his God is his one stay. "Let not thy God in Whom thou trustest deceive \* thee." What though he has said, Jerusalem shall not fall into Assyrian hands; ask your common sense in the light of facts. Think of the mighty cities whose destruction is patent to you, and think of the powerlessness of their gods. Probably the kings of Hamath and of Arpad put a like unreasoning trust in their gods.

What could Hezekiah say? the facts urged were true enough, yet the promise had been given "Be not afraid." There was but one course; he doubtless trembled, but his faith was unbroken. He went into the Temple and spread the letter before the LORD. It is instructive to compare the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer with that of the message he sent to Isaiah, imploring him to pray to God for help, on the occasion of the former demand for surrender. We do not hear now "*Peradventure* Jehovah thy God will hear." There is no "*peradventure*" now, no sheltering behind Isaiah as a mediator. He prays in the intensest faith, an agony it may be, but still a faith, not the agony of despair, or the blackness of hopeless doubt.

The reference to the cherubim has led some to suppose that Hezekiah, regardless of God's Law, had with a recklessness far exceeding that of his great-grandfather Uzziah, pressed into the Holy of Holies, and there besought God's help. Not only is there nothing in the story to suggest such an intrusion, but

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\* The word for "deceive" here is the same as that translated "beguile" in Eve's complaint, "the serpent beguiled me."

it is inconceivable that Hezekiah, whose prayer shews us the state of his mind, should have commenced his plea for God's help in the hour of his extremest need by so decided a defiance of God's Law.

Hezekiah's plea is that God's glory may be vindicated. The gods of the nations have doubtless been destroyed, why should not gods of wood and stone so perish, and, so long as the Assyrian power continues, their worshippers fall before the conqueror? But when that conqueror blasphemes the living God, it is time that God should interpose, that the world may know that Jehovah alone is God.

To this prayer a detailed answer is speedily given, partly addressed to Hezekiah, and partly containing a message addressed to Sennacherib. Isaiah, surely supernaturally warned of Hezekiah's appeal, and of the answer which God vouchsafed, declares the Divine message of peace to the suppliant, as Ananias to the stricken Saul at Damascus.

The message comes to us in two recensions, 2 Kings 19. 20-34 and Isa. 37. 21-35, but the differences are merely verbal, and do not call for any special remark. The Divine answer comes to the main point at once, "I have heard thy prayer," where "to hear" clearly means "to accept." Then we read, in the seven following verses, a direct message to Sennacherib himself from God. How far any answer, verbal or written, was given to the Assyrian officers from the walls of Jerusalem, we cannot say; the Bible is completely silent on the point. Yet surely the words of the prophecy, uttered in the first instance to Hezekiah, must speedily have become generally known throughout Jerusalem, where the anxiety must have been at the utmost tension, and thus it is hard to suppose that some answer, in which the refusal to surrender the city was based on this absolutely satisfying Divine promise, should not have been sent to the messengers. In such a case, can

we not picture the amazement, so great as at first to dwarf all other feelings, with which the Assyrian officers must have heard the news? An insignificant city, important doubtless through its strong position, has not only refused a second time to surrender to the Great King, but has aggravated its refusal by insults, and, in vain reliance on their national God, has dared to utter personal threats to the king.

“Thou hast blasphemed the Holy One of Israel.” Such is the charge. There was no new point in it. Sennacherib’s message to Isaiah was, “Let not thy God in Whom thou trustest deceive thee.” It is God Himself who now says “I will repay.” He puts into the prophet’s mouth words which tell the Assyrian monarch’s thoughts, the vainglory which sees no obstacles to universal victory, the overweening confidence in which all nations and their gods are doomed to fall before him. Like Southey’s Kehama, the gods of the nations are no more able to contend against him than the people who serve them.

The haughty monarch’s thoughts turn in part to the past, his occupation of the heights of Lebanon, the inaccessible mountain range where cedars and firs had been hewed down at will, and the region utterly devastated. The Carmel, the garden-forest, the fruitful region of central Palestine, is occupied. Even across rugged mountains his chariots force their way. If the “strange waters” refers to Palestine, then the huge force of the invaders had drunk dry the rivers and were forced to dig wells. One is reminded of Juvenal’s bold figure of the invading army of Xerxes, “*epotaque flumina Medo prandente*.” Rivers were drunk dry when the Medes took their morning meal.

The tenses in 2 Kings 19. 24, Isa. 37. 25, are perhaps somewhat doubtful. It seems best to take the initial perfects, “I have digged and drunk,” as ordinary past tenses and refer them to what had already been achieved; and the following “will I dry up all



the rivers of Egypt"\* to be a looking forward to an achievement in the future, a successful invasion of Egypt. Yet, according to some, the former is an example of what is known as the "prophetic perfect," in which a prophet so completely realises the certain accomplishment of what God has announced that he speaks of it as though it had actually happened. In this latter case, the wells would be those dug in the desert between Palestine and Egypt, which Sennacherib boasts shall be no obstacle to his onward march.

In either case, however, it is clear that the reference in the second clause of the verse is to an achievement yet in the future, a successful invasion of Egypt, protected not merely by the desert on the eastern frontier, but by the mass of canals branching from the Nile, with which it was cut up in every direction for purposes of irrigation, and therefore, it was fondly hoped, impassable for an enemy's cavalry. Herodotus tells the story † that Sesostris, by an indefinite amount of forced labour, had the whole of Egypt intersected with canals. "By these forced labours the entire face of the country was changed; for whereas Egypt had formerly been a region suited both for horses and carriages, henceforth it became entirely unfit for either. Though a flat country throughout its whole extent, it is now unfit for either horse or carriage, being cut up by the canals, which are extremely numerous and run in all directions." ‡ Such a land would obviously be one in which an invader, strong in cavalry and chariots, would be at a disadvantage. Yet as Napoleon claimed to have struck the word "impossible" out of the vocabulary, so to Sennacherib's overweening fancy these rivers shall be as dry land before him.

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\* The A.V. has "rivers of besieged places," but though the Hebrew *Mazor* is not seldom used for "a state of siege," "siege-works" (e.g. 2 Kings 24. 10), yet in the present passage there can be no doubt that it means Egypt, a poetical equivalent for the ordinary *dual*-form *Mizraim*. It may be noted also that the word translated "rivers" is the regular word for the branches and canals of the Nile.

† II. 108.

‡ See Rawlinson, *Herod.*, Vol. II., 178.



In answer to these wild thoughts of the monarch comes the Divine question, embodying the supreme truth of the Providential government of the world. Whether Sennacherib knows it or knows it not, God has fixed from days of old the fate of nations, fixed the time of their rise and fall, and the agencies which should lead to their overthrow. The question seems to imply that Sennacherib should have realised the fact of the ordered government of the world in accordance with the decrees of God. Yet any idea that, in his chastisement of the nations, he was merely acting as God's instrument, was evidently utterly foreign to the mind of the Assyrian king. The axe boasted against him that hewed therewith, the saw magnified itself against him that shook it. Then comes the doom. "Because of thy raging against Me, and for that thine arrogance is come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest."

To an Assyrian or Babylonian, the mention of the hook and the bridle would be highly suggestive. The hook must have been much the same as the ring which occasionally we put through the nose of a bull, so that he can be led about with a cord, and was the method in use among the Assyrians for leading prisoners. Manasseh was taken "with hooks" \* and in fetters to Babylon (2 Chron. 33. 11). Thus Sennacherib would realise the meaning of the threat; whether it was to be taken literally or not, he knew that he was threatened with a terrible overthrow.

Yet the prophecy does not leave the trembling Israelites here. It might be argued by desponding souls, that in spite of Assyrian calamities, there might be a long period of trouble still in store for Judah. Till the greatness of the catastrophe

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\* The Hebrew word here merely differs in its vocalization from that in Isaiah's denunciation of Sennacherib.

was known, it might be thought by some that an empire which for generations had had so unbroken a career of conquest would probably soon rally from a temporary check, and then the old trouble would again appear. Thus a definite "sign" is given to Israel. After two years' cessation of regular tillage, farm labour shall again begin and they shall reap their fruits in peace, undisturbed by any further attack of Sennacherib. It has been shewn from the inscriptions that Sennacherib survived this awful manifestation of the Divine wrath for nearly twenty years, yet never again during his reign did an Assyrian army tread the soil of Palestine.

It will be noticed that the promise is distinctly called a "sign"; it was to be one whose truth was capable of being tested. Why a second year was to pass before the old order was to be restored, does not appear. It has indeed been suggested that the second year was perhaps the sabbatical year, and so would in any case have been one during which the land would lie fallow; but we should have expected in such a case some allusion to the reason. Nor does it seem likely that the reference is to devastation done by the retiring Assyrian army, for so long a delay seems hard to account for. Whatever be the explanation, the promise stands out clear and plain. After twice having to be content with a harvest from the grain which had sown itself, then shall the old order be resumed, men shall sow and reap, with none to make them afraid.

Although the Bible says little directly on the subject, yet obviously the condition of Judah, even after the great deliverance, must have been very terrible: a very large part of the little kingdom devastated, the fair country turned into a howling wilderness, the country dwellers, slain many of them, many carried off into captivity. It will be remembered that the inscription on the Taylor cylinder spoke of 200,150 captives, men and women, and oxen, sheep and other animals without

number. Nor does there seem any valid reason for doubting the substantial truth of this. The rest of the country people who had escaped massacre and captivity we may suppose to have crowded into Jerusalem as the one place of refuge left to them. Well then may Isaiah talk of the "remnant that is escaped"; they were but a remnant, yet from them the old glory shall once again spring. When the Assyrian troops had disappeared, these trembling fugitives are promised a freedom from the old peril.

At this stage it might have been thought that the prophecy was complete, the doom has been pronounced on the impious invaders, words of comfort uttered to trembling Israel, yet the prophet continues by adding a definite promise concerning Sennacherib addressed to Hezekiah and his people: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake and for My servant David's sake," 2 Kings 19. 32-34.

Certain "critics" have ruled that these verses are no real prediction, they are simply a prophecy after the event. We do not propose to discuss here the reasons alleged for this view, which seem strangely inconclusive, save to remark that if these verses, while falsely assuming to be predictive, had been written after the great catastrophe, we might surely have looked for an unmistakeable allusion to the manner of the deliverance. In dealing with matter so priceless as the text of Scripture, the constant "all critics are agreed" is as a feather-weight when viewed as evidence. The promise, it will be observed, is twofold. There shall be no siege, no, nor the beginning of one; and the Assyrian king shall go back by the way he came.

A slight difference will be noticed between the A.V. and R.V. of the first clause, "he shall not come into this city," where the R.V., making the promise even more comprehensive, gives "unto." The question is not one of any great moment, being a mere matter of degree; yet if there is an increasing emphasis throughout the verse, the rendering of the A.V. is perhaps to be preferred. The exact shade of meaning of the Hebrew is perhaps indeterminate, but the rendering of the A.V. can be supported by a sufficient number of passages. None of the terrors of a siege by the Assyrians need now affright the men of Jerusalem. "Arrow" and "shield" and "bank" are words which in fact sum up an Assyrian battlefield. From the numerous representations of Assyrian warfare which are now known, one would infer that the archers were as important an element as English archers with their cloth-yard shafts in the days of the Plantagenets. Guarded by their huge shields, it was their province to harass the besieged, while the mounds were erected on which the battering rams would play and from which sharp-shooters could pick off any of the defenders who came within range.

The invader "shall return by the way that he came." This no doubt refers to the route through the Shephelah, or low country, for though, on the view which we have advocated, it seems probable that a large detachment marched directly on Jerusalem by a south-easterly course through Judah, yet the main army under the king had marched along the coast road.

The whole promise is summed up in its concluding words, "For I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." "Hath He spoken and shall He not do it; hath He promised, and shall He not bring it to pass"? The Bible story runs on with startling suddenness. The decree has gone forth, the fulfilment follows at once:—"And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD



went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand ; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

Of the place where this appalling event happened, the Bible tells us nothing, and we must discuss the matter below ; but the note of time is plain, "that night," the night which followed the prophecy of the deliverance. It is true that these words are wanting in the parallel accounts in Isaiah and in 2 Chronicles ; but such omission is quite beside the mark as to the credibility of the statement before us. Moreover, it may be added that, as compared with the account in Kings, the story as told in Isaiah is full of numerous small omissions. The date of the composition of Chronicles again is much later. When it is a common-place of the "higher criticism" that we may freely discount the statements in Chronicles, it seems rather inconsistent to lay any stress on a point wherein *e silentio* it differs from Kings.

Before making any remarks on the catastrophe itself, the question may be raised as to the place where it befell. If the Bible story were all that had come down to us, probably we should all assume that it happened to the army encamped close to Jerusalem, though there is no assertion of this. Possibly this inference is correct ; yet the occurrence of the curious parallel statement in Herodotus, which we shall presently quote, points to a place within the Egyptian frontier where we may suppose the main Assyrian army, with the king, to be encamped. But further, it is hard to fancy that the Assyrians sent to Jerusalem with the final demand for surrender, merely called "messengers" in the narrative (2 Kings 19. 9), can have been an army of such huge dimensions. We cannot help feeling that however much there may be of wild and foolish legend in the story which the priests of Memphis told Herodotus, there is an historical basis underlying it, which cannot



safely be despised. It will be remembered that the date of Herodotus' visit to Egypt fell approximately about 450 B.C., and thus not more than two centuries and a half after the events we are now considering.

The story as told by Herodotus (II. 141) runs as follows. We give it according to the rendering of Canon Rawlinson.\* "The next king, I was told, was a priest of Vulcan, called Sethos. This monarch despised and neglected the warrior class of the Egyptians, as though he did not need their services. Among other indignities which he offered them, he took from them the lands which they had possessed under all the previous kings, consisting of twelve acres of choice land for each warrior. Afterwards, therefore, when Sanacherib, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, marched his vast army into Egypt, the warriors one and all refused to come to his aid. On this the monarch, greatly distressed, entered into the inner sanctuary, and before the image of the god bewailed the fate which impended over him. As he wept he fell asleep, and dreamt that the god came and stood at his side, bidding him be of good cheer, and go boldly forth to meet the Arabian host, which would do him no hurt, as he himself would send those who should help him. Sethos then, relying on the dream, collected such of the Egyptians as were willing to follow him, and who were none of them warriors, but traders, artisans, and market people; and with these marched to Pelusium, which commands the entrance into Egypt, and there pitched his camp. As the two armies lay here opposite one another, there came in the night a multitude of field-mice, which devoured all the quivers and bowstrings of the enemy, and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their flight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves. There stands to this day, in the Temple of Vulcan,

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\* *The History of Herodotus*, II., 221.

a stone statue of Sethos, with a mouse in his hand, and an inscription to this effect, 'Look on me and learn to reverence the gods.'"

A few preliminary comments may be made here. Herodotus, communicating with the priests of Memphis by means of his interpreter, would naturally fix upon the name Hephæstus (Vulcan) to represent Phtah, the peculiar god of Memphis, though the association is one of sound only. Again, the name of the King Sethos is one which we believe has not as yet been identified, the Sethi of the nineteenth dynasty being of an altogether different period. The conclusion come to by Sir Gardner Wilkinson\* is that as Tirhakah's authority extended at this time over the whole country up to the Syrian frontier, "no other Pharaoh can have ruled at that time in Egypt. We may therefore conclude that Herodotus has given to a *priest* of Phtah the title of *king*." He further suggests that the omission of any notice of Tirhakah by the Egyptian informants of Herodotus may be due to jealousy of the Ethiopians. Once again, why does Herodotus speak of Sennacherib as "king of the Arabians and Assyrians," as though the Assyrians were the secondary element? It is impossible of course to account for this; but there would anyhow be a large Arabian element in the Assyrian army, and the Egyptians may have put in the front the name of a race more familiar to them.

Canon Rawlinson has strikingly pointed out that, however much the Bible and the Egyptian stories differ, there are some marked points of agreement:—(1) The *promise* of deliverance, consequent upon a special appeal to the suppliant's God, (2) the coming of the deliverance *in the night*, (3) its *miraculous* or at least its *extraordinary*, character, (4) its *silence* and *secrecy*, which caused it to create no disturbance at the time, and

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\* *Op. cit.*, u.s.

(5) its discovery *when morning came*, and its immediate consequence, *flight*.

The story which the priests of Memphis told Herodotus has to be accounted for somehow. We are persuaded that the simplest solution is to suppose that Sennacherib's army had crossed the Egyptian frontier, and a battle ensued, in which not only were the Assyrians routed with great loss, but some strange events, miraculous in the eyes of Egypt, had taken place, which made that rout an easy one. Let it be assumed that it was here that the blast of the destroying angel had struck them, and much of the present difficulty is got rid of. A terrible and sudden calamity befell the Assyrian army in Egypt, rendering a precipitate retreat necessary, itself accompanied with much further slaughter at the hands of the Egyptians. Naturally the primary disaster would be referred by the Egyptian priests to the intervention of the Egyptian deities (the priests of Memphis naturally name their own peculiar god Phtah), and the story of the mice is doubtless grafted on for some earlier mysterious reason.

If we do not accept some such solution, then we must conclude with Dr. Sayce that the whole story is a travesty of that in the Bible, "even the priestly character of Sethos being based on the religious reforms of Hezekiah." Thus "Egyptian vanity has flattered itself not only by claiming the credit of overthrowing the Assyrians, but also by ignoring the fact that Egypt, in the time of Sennacherib's campaign, was governed by an Ethiopian conqueror." Tirhakah is, of course, ignored anyhow, and doubtless from jealousy; but surely it is impossible yet to rule with absolute certainty what were the limits of the line of march of Sennacherib, or what is the plain unvarnished tale of the struggle between him and Tirhakah. It is true that nothing is known of Sethos; but this is explained if he be the chief priest of Phtah, to whom the

priests of later days gave the title of king. *The particular shaping of the story*, the intervention of the mice, "was suggested to the guides of Herodotus by the figure of a mouse in the hands of a god, whose image he was shewn at Memphis."\* Surely while the figure of the mouse might suggest *the particular shaping of the story*, the underlying thought of a miraculous deliverance is independent of the fantastic incrustation.

On this latter theory, Sennacherib was encamped somewhere in the south-west of Palestine, and on the news of the disaster retreated hastily to Nineveh. Yet if we accept the number of the deaths recorded in the Bible, and there is no variation in our texts, one is somewhat puzzled as to what the whole number of the undivided Assyrian army can have been, for Canon Rawlinson tells us that so far as the Assyrian kings mention the size of their armies, the numbers are usually between 100,000 and 200,000. Doubtless, until we obtain fresh evidence, it will be wise to avoid an over rigid positiveness.

That the wrath of the Almighty was manifested, not merely the Bible story tells us, but the remorseless logic of the cuneiform inscriptions themselves. Jerusalem is confessedly untaken, yet no subsequent Assyrian expedition is sent against it during the twenty remaining years of Sennacherib's reign to retrieve the failure. Where the blow fell we cannot certainly say, and it is a matter of secondary consequence.

A good deal of misplaced ingenuity, as it seems to us, has been expended on the question how this great destruction of life was effected. Yet, unless we deny the truth of the story, we must allow its miraculous character, and therefore that it is conceivably outside the lines of human explanations. Doubtless many a special intervention of Providence has been effected, many a deliverance from peril, in answer to prayer, many an

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\**Life and Times of Isaiah*, p. 33.



unlooked-for turn in the run of events, where, though we may believe there was a special intervention, there were only natural processes, and where an unbeliever would remark, These so-called special Providences are simply coincidences. Still we may well believe that a supernatural element is manifested, in that events are so shaped to a special end.

Yet there are miracles which no such explanation can touch, where we must either confess "God's ways are past finding out," or boldly declare that alleged miracles are but stories which survive from a too credulous age. No rationalizing explanation can meet the case of the miracles of Cana of Galilee, or the withering of the barren fig tree. Nor, again, is there anything but either simple faith, which realises that there is a point beyond which inquiry and argument are useless, or absolute denial, in the case of such a miracle as the death of the first-born in Egypt, a marvel which is a very close parallel to that now before us. All theories which put forward some intelligible natural means seem utterly to fail in meeting the case. A storm, an outburst of plague, a night attack—none of these would have allowed the survivors to remain in happy ignorance till they rose early in the morning, nor does it seem conceivable that any of these causes would have wrought so vast a destruction in a single night.

Of the nature of the panic that ensued, or of any events on the homeward march through Philistia and Phœnicia, we know nothing but the one fact—flight. The Bible sums up Sennacherib's action in few words, "He departed and went and returned." The Assyrian inscriptions, in their suppression of facts, are eloquent in their silence.

We need only devote a few words to Sennacherib's future career. He continued to reign about twenty years after this catastrophe. No fewer than five military enterprises are recorded on the Taylor cylinder as taking place during these



years, but none of these were directed westward. The greatest event of these years was the capture and destruction by Sennacherib of Babylon, of which Professor McCurdy justly says that "it may be counted among the calamities of human history." A few more years passed by, and then this blasphemer of God, this scourge of humanity, met his doom at the hands of two of his sons.

The memory of the great deliverance sank deep into the heart of the Israelites of later days. Five centuries after, the son of Sirach, in his noble eulogy of "famous men and our fathers that begat us," tells of Hezekiah,\* in whose time Sennacherib came up. "Then trembled their hearts and hands, and they were in pain as women in travail. But they called upon the LORD which is merciful, and stretched out their hands toward Him ; and immediately the Holy One heard them out of heaven and delivered them by the ministry of Esay. He smote the host of the Assyrians and His angel destroyed them." Or let us picture to ourselves that "Valiant-for-Truth," Judas Maccabæus, as he marshals his little band near to the scene of Joshua's victory at Beth-horon, and before engaging with Nicanor pleads† that as the blasphemy of the Assyrians met with so deadly a punishment, so now, too, God would avenge the blasphemy of the Syrians and discomfit the host before them.

Yet when, after centuries, we see the memory of the deliverance so deeply engrained, how intense must have been the joy and thanksgiving as doubt gave way to conviction when, on the promise of deliverance given by the lips of Isaiah, there followed the tidings that the "LORD had caused His glorious voice to be heard," and that at that voice the Assyrian was broken in pieces. God had promised that He "would bind up the hurt of His people and heal the stroke of their wound." Faithless

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\* Ecclus. 48. 17 f.

† 1 Macc. 7. 41.

Israel could now see the faithfulness of God when "the Assyrian had fallen with the sword, not of man, and the sword, not of men, had devoured him."

Four of our Psalms, **46, 47, 48, 76**, are, we are firmly convinced, to be referred to this period of thankful rejoicing. The evidence is indeed entirely inferential, save that the LXX. embodies in its heading to the last named Psalm the tradition that the Psalm bore reference to the Assyrian invasion; yet we do not think any other time can be found in Israelite history which can properly suit the conditions of these Psalms save that of Sennacherib's invasion. There are sufficiently striking resemblances between the four members of the group to justify us in assigning them to the same period. A foreign army had threatened Jerusalem and had encamped near it. Suddenly the power of Jehovah, put forth on behalf of His people, shattered the power of the foe, like ships of Tarshish by the stormy wind. As for the foes, "Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail"; but as for Israel, "Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments." We do not read of any other instance in the history, where Jerusalem is alarmingly threatened by a powerful assailant, where a deliverance, which the Psalmist refers to a direct intervention of God,\* was vouchsafed. Jehoshaphat's victory (2 Chron. 20) has sometimes been suggested as a probable reference, yet we do not find that in that campaign Jerusalem itself was threatened, whereas the above-mentioned Psalms dwell strongly on the idea of God's arising to protect the sacred city.

For the time then, thankful and believing Israel summed up all thoughts in the refrain "The LORD of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge."

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\* *e.g.* 46. 6, 8; 48. 5-7; 76. 6-9.

## CHAPTER XI.

## CONCLUSION.

HOW long Hezekiah lived after the great deliverance cannot be said with certainty, but it seems probable that he did not long survive it. We have already spoken of the extreme uncertainty as to parts of the chronology, and cannot again dwell on the subject, but it may be remarked that opinion is steadily settling in the direction of fixing 701 B.C. as the date of the great invasion. Moreover, we are told that "in the reign of Manasseh, both systems of chronology (*i.e.* Biblical and Assyrian) satisfactorily harmonize."\* This would seem to give Hezekiah but two or three more years of reign and of life after Sennacherib's retreat, his death in all probability happening in 697 B.C.

On the view which we have advocated, that Hezekiah's illness and recovery preceded the great invasion, we are left entirely to our own inferences as to the events of the few concluding years. Of course this view is merely tentative, as the simplest solution, *in our present knowledge of facts*, of the difficulties of the case. The grouping of the details given in the Books of Kings and Chronicles might at first sight seem to suggest that the illness occurred after the great invasion, but such a view would involve us in considerable difficulties; and it is far from improbable that the compiler drew the

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\* Schrader, II. 171.

account of the illness from some independent narrative, without intending to fix by the "in those days" its relative position to the other events in his own record.

Accepting this view then, all we get from the Bible story is the conclusion of the Chronicler: "Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth."

Though we cannot picture the details, the general aspect of things is plain enough. An awful peril had been passed through, and deliverance granted from it. Yet it was not peril only, when for the moment the doubt lay between destruction and safety. Disasters, which the heart of the nation must have turned sick to contemplate, had fallen in repeated blows. In any estimate of the state of the time, we must keep both thoughts well in view. Profound thankfulness there must have been in all hearts, varying with the power of realising how direct and how complete had been the deliverance. Yet it was other than such thankfulness as must have filled the hearts of our fathers, when, by the blessing of God, Nelson shattered the allied fleets at Trafalgar; rather was it such a feeling as must have moved to the quick the stubborn defenders of Leyden, when through their noble self-devotion the Spaniards were forced to raise the siege; or, to come nearer home, when the heroic townsmen of Derry, in a siege where it is hard to say whether the horrors experienced, or the heroism with which they were endured, impress the mind most, were at last relieved after their terrible ordeal. No past sufferings, no realisation of losses, could blot out or even dull the fact of the deliverance, yet, on the other hand, not even the pro-

foudest thankfulness, the most intense faith, could undo the awful past. The nation, still, as it were, bleeding at every pore, must now set itself to the task of staunching the wounds, and settling things in order for a renewed life.

So far as Assyria was concerned, Israel had complete respite till the death of Sennacherib. Yet for the greater part of this period of twenty years, the destinies of the little kingdom were swayed not by the God-fearing Hezekiah, who, after the fiery trial he had passed through, and the startling fulfilment of the promise of deliverance, can hardly conceivably have distrusted the power of Jehovah or His faithfulness; but by a youth, too young perhaps at his father's death to have been deeply influenced by him, first doubtless a tool and at last the chief of the faction of idolatrous nobles, whom Isaiah so steadfastly resisted, the one persecuting king of Judah, Manasseh, whom after-ages of Israelites held in such horror that the Talmud speaks of him as one of the three kings who have no portion in the world to come.

Hezekiah died at the comparatively early age of fifty-six. Had his life been prolonged even to the ideal three-score and ten, humanly speaking, a quite different turn might have been given to Judæan history; but it is plain that many a phase of sharp suffering was necessary for the shaping of the race. Thus it might seem that much of what Hezekiah had achieved was destroyed by his son, who "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to another," when the righteous perished and no one laid it to heart, or considered that it was from the evil that the righteous was taken away. So it might have seemed, so it doubtless did seem, to many good men then; yet the outbreak of fresh life with Josiah shews that there was but a purging, not a destroying, of the good. What though there was again a lapse, and God "brought upon them the king of the Chaldees," it was through this long baptism



of suffering that the nation was shaped for the reception in the end of the ages of Him whom Isaiah had dimly seen through the centuries, and had pictured in words which we, amid the fullest blaze of gospel light, recognise as the Divine oracle speaking of Jesus of Nazareth.

It would be an interesting task to seek to sketch in detail the character of Hezekiah, who occupies so strikingly crucial a position in history, yet it must be admitted that the Bible record does but allow us to sketch it in very general outline. Probably all careful readers have been struck by the difference between the Books of Samuel and Kings in the matter of biographical portraiture. In the former, besides such prominent figures as Samuel, and Saul, and David, and Absalom, who stand out of the canvas with vivid personality, there are not a few others the record of whose life brings out the character, as if we had actually known them. How plainly can we realise the figure of Jonathan, with his chivalrous generosity and abnegation of self, or Joab, with his rugged fidelity, none too well requited, like that of some Highland henchman, or such slighter sketches as those of the treacherous Abner, or cunning Ziba, or many more. Yet when we turn to the Book of Kings the case is utterly different. If we cut out the stories of Elijah and Elisha, which stand upon a totally different footing to the rest of the book, and were doubtless largely drawn from some special "source," we cannot be said to have any portraiture. The Book of Samuel is biographical story, that of Kings is annalistic. We have to read cautiously between the lines to get glimpses of the personal character, as opposed to the royal policy, of Asa or Jehoshaphat or Uzziah, or even of Solomon. Thus when we consider the case of Hezekiah, beyond the broad record, "he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did," all is matter of inference.

Yet one or two points may be laid down with some confidence. In the first place, it may be safely asserted that, of whatever errors of judgment he may have been guilty, he was uniformly and steadily a devout servant of God throughout his life, seeking help in his extremity with an earnestness which shews how deeply rooted was his devotion. The eulogy of the son of Sirach does but echo the Bible record : "All, except David and Ezekias and Josias, were defective ; for they forsook the Law of the Most High, even the kings of Judah failed."

Of his earnestness and devotion there can be no question : but these are words which might be applied to religious soldiers in Cromwell's Ironsides, or to Covenanters face to face with Claverhouse. There is no doubt of the earnestness and intense piety of many of these, yet these grave, stern, dour men do not furnish Hezekiah's type. He was, unless we much mistake, of a distinctly emotional type. His reception of the news which bids him prepare for death, or of the report of the Rab-Shakeh's blasphemy, seems to point to him as a man whose feelings were readily worked on, a true Oriental in his manifestation of them, yet on all the three occasions of a great alarm befalling him, he at once sought the help of God, nor once sought it in vain.

One cannot but feel that the more sensitive, emotional type of man is at times judged rather harshly, as compared with the tougher-fibred man. Emotionalism need not be, and often is not, the same as cowardice. Cranmer, for example, flinched in the first instance from the fiery trial set before him, but how unjust it would be to brand this as cowardice is shewn by his heroic after-conduct. The taunts of Macaulay can only be called as unworthy as they are unjust. So, too, Hezekiah was enabled to turn as steadily to his God, and persist in the cause of duty, spite of his tears, as if he had been cast in more Spartan mould.

How far we are to credit Hezekiah with broad notions of statemanship, how far there was anything exceptional in the intellectual powers with which God had gifted him, it is impossible to say. In any case, he had the prudence to realize the strength and wisdom of his chief adviser Isaiah, and latterly, at any rate, to be guided entirely by that great man, conspicuous alike as a bold and unflinching servant of Jehovah, at a time when there must have been extreme pressure to resist, a wise and bold statesman of uncompromising directness, a prophet-poet to whom the gift of utterance had been granted beyond most of the sons of men.

Of Hezekiah's strong, practical, common sense, as manifested in his care for the water-supply and the fortification of Jerusalem, we have already spoken at length, as well as of his vigorous generalship in the prosecution of his campaigns.

On one point, of which we have not spoken, it may be well to touch briefly, the evidence for an æsthetic and literary side, though our whole fabric must be built up from a few stray allusions. In the case of his father, the weak and unworthy Ahaz, we find glimpses of leanings of this kind. The pains taken to send to Urijah the priest the pattern and details of the altar which pleased his fancy at Damascus shew that the historian is not recording a lapse into idolatry merely, but also a curious hankering after art novelties for the sanctuary. Possibly, too, we may refer to him, and to the same influencing causes, the images of the horses and chariots of the sun, which Josiah afterwards destroyed (2 Kings 23. 11) ; and if we are right in assuming that the sun-dial of Ahaz was an Assyrian device which, having caught Ahaz's fancy at Damascus, was reproduced by him at Jerusalem, we get a clue to a side of his character on which the Bible does not think it necessary to dwell. It is of course not necessary to assume that because the father had æsthetic leanings, we are therefore to attribute the

same to the son, but, in the view of the one or two facts which shew that he had a literary bent, it would be unfair to ignore it. The "writing of Hezekiah," the utterance of thanksgiving on his recovery, is a poem of very great beauty and power, though by no means free from difficulty. Although it is the only one which has been preserved to us, yet we cannot doubt that it is the work of a trained and practised hand, which realized its own powers too well not to utilize them. A curious light is flashed upon us from a supplement to the Book of Proverbs, 25. 1 : "These also are Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." It is a fair inference from this verse that the court of Hezekiah was one where due encouragement was given to the cause of learning, and pre-eminently we may suppose, of sacred learning. He doubtless had his library, such a library perhaps on a smaller scale as that which Asshur-bani-pal amassed, and which the late Mr. George Smith brought to light. A curious illustration of the literary activity of Hezekiah's court is furnished by the often quoted passage of the Talmud as to the "writing" of the books of the Old Testament. The clause that now concerns us runs thus :—"Hezekiah and his associates wrote the books for which the memorial word (Siman) is *Yod. Mem, Shin, Koph, i.e.* Isaiah, Proverbs (*Mishle*), Song of Songs (*Shir ha-Shirim*), and Ecclesiastes (*Koheleth*)."<sup>\*</sup> We are not now concerned to ask what is the true historical meaning, but it is important as testifying to the survival of a tradition distinctly connecting Hezekiah with the preservation and transmission of the sacred books.

However sketchy may be the portrait which can be drawn of Hezekiah's personal character, yet it is striking to note how prominent a position he fills when we survey God's work in shaping the course of Israel under the kingdom. The people had utterly failed to rise to their true ideal, and be constituted

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<sup>\*</sup> *Tal. Bab., Baba Bathra, l. 15a.*



as a pure theocracy, and the kingdom was the only means by which the unification of Israel could be attained. Yet after three reigns the scheme broke down—three reigns in which the state of things changed so utterly, that the first king comes from following the plough to relieve a beleaguered town, and, the victory won, doubtless returned to his farm, while the third king lives in the style of a true eastern despot, sitting on a golden throne, receiving foreign ambassadors, with his palace full of foreign wives. The Disruption was inevitable; tribal jealousy and the heavy pressure of Solomon's rule alike forced it on. Thus the "remnant," the people out of whom the future Messianic kingdom was to be shaped, became the little kingdom of Judah.

From that time forward to the end, there were two occasions of a critical importance above all others in the permanent effect on the nation—the period when they stood face to face with a hostile Assyria, and had the truth driven home that "God is a very present help in trouble," and the period when Josiah sought, with a thoroughness which throws even the zeal of Hezekiah into the shade, to drag his people out of the slough of idolatry and the attendant evils into which they had sunk. Had there not been a reformer such as Josiah, and had the evil régime of Manasseh and Amon been followed by a series of Jehoiakims, clearly it would have been hardly possible that there could have been a sufficient faithful remnant to preserve the truth throughout the Babylonian exile, while undergoing that further bitter chapter of their lesson.

On the earlier occasion, when to Hezekiah so perilous a responsibility was entrusted, even while one realises how large was the share borne by Isaiah in guiding the policy of the king, it is impossible not to feel that at so critical a juncture an exceptional man was raised to sit on the throne. What would have happened if, for example, Ahaz or Manasseh had



been king in Jerusalem when Sennacherib's army was encamped near it, it is impossible to say. God's ends will be attained, be the human agents what they may. But when we have realised how the fittest human agents are raised up for His purpose; how, for instance, at the dividing of the ways for the infant Church, a Paul is raised up to guide the Church to a nobler end than that of being a Jewish sect among Jewish sects; when, in the fourth century, the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, the co-equal Divinity of the Saviour, seemed a topic for the battling of theologians, an Athanasius is raised up who maintains that truth "against the world," and saw it triumphant; or when in the sixteenth century, a solitary monk was raised to put the axe to the growth of corruption and abuses in the Western Church—when we realise cases like these, we can believe how suitable was the human agent for the Divine purpose at the invasion of Sennacherib, how completely the fact that Hezekiah, being the man that he was, should have been the king who sat on the throne of David at this critical juncture, shews to him who believes that God is seen in history, that the abiding purpose of God holds, be the nations never so unquiet.

"Thou didst cause Thy judgment to be heard from heaven, the earth trembled and was still."



## APPENDIX.

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### THE AUTHENTICITY OF ISAIAH XL.—LXVI.

WHEN we reflect on the exceptionally prominent position occupied in Hezekiah's reign by the prophet Isaiah, we are naturally led to dwell on the written records, which that prophet, taught by the Holy Spirit, has bequeathed to after ages of the Church.

It seems to have become of late an axiom with a large body of critics that Isaiah was certainly not the author of chaps. 40-66, or indeed of the whole of the preceding chapters. The portions thus denied to him are asserted to be of Exilic or post-Exilic date. The last twenty-seven chapters were called by Ewald the work of the "Great Unnamed" poet-prophet of the Exile; later critics have improved upon this to the extent of seeing in it a blend of the work of several hands, five according to some.

The subject seems sufficiently germane to that of the present work to justify us in entering briefly into the discussion, How far are the grounds which are alleged sufficient to justify critics in denying the authenticity (in the proper sense of that word) of the concluding chapters of Isaiah? Is it still reasonable to hold that Isaiah was the author? It will of course be understood that, in the space at our disposal, we can but in the most general way outline the arguments. A large volume might well be devoted to them.

Let us in the first instance urge the fact that we are not now dealing with two rival theories put forth to explain the facts. Suppose that an ancient Greek MS. should come to light of a work which, till the discovery, had been absolutely unknown to the modern world, the question would at once arise, what was the date when the author lived?—we are not now speaking of the date of the MS. itself. Various opinions would doubtless be put forward, and each one would have as good an *à priori* claim to be heard as another. The theories would come into court for trial on exactly the same footing.

This is not at all the case in the matter of Isaiah. As we shall briefly show, there has been absolute unanimity of view in the Jewish and Christian Church until the eighteenth century after Christ. As far back as we can trace the evidence, the Book of Isaiah has always been viewed as one and indivisible, though of course it may have undergone careful and reverent editorial action. Thus there is a very definite *onus probandi* on those who would maintain the contrary, who by subjective arguments would seek to overthrow the historical view. While wishing to treat with the utmost courtesy the arguments of the assailing critics, we would urge that their claim to have carried the citadel is decidedly Not Proven.

Let us in the first place seek to show briefly how unanimous is the historic testimony to the unity of Isaiah. We may remind our readers that if Isaiah is really the author of the later chapters, their date may be given as the beginning of the seventh century B.C. (the great invasion took place, it will be remembered, in 701 B.C.); but if written towards the end of the Exile (save in so far as there are post-Exilic portions), they may be assigned to about 540 B.C., that is, two years before the fall of Babylon.

We cannot pretend to take up the question of the Duality *versus* the Plurality of the Book of Isaiah, but merely the broad question, May we believe that Isaiah wrote the twenty-seven concluding chapters of the prophecy?

We may begin by referring to the words of Cyrus, cited in the Bible (Ezra 1. 2 *f.*, 2 Chron. 36. 23; *cf.* Isa. 44. 28; 45. 1, 13), in which the king appeals to the command of God, Who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, that he should rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, and declares his intention of carrying out that command. Are we to suppose that this astute monarch would have embarked upon a scheme so contrary to Eastern usage as to allow a body of captives who had been deported to return to their own land, and to restore to them a vast amount of treasure for the furtherance of their purpose, unless he had the fullest belief that an ancient prophet speaking long before had distinctly foretold his action? To raise no other objections, we should have thought that a statement of the action of Cyrus, issued about 540 B.C., while he was in the full career of conquest, which was only a piece of political cunning while professing to be an ancient Divine prediction, could hardly have failed to have been detected for what it was by the king and his advisers, and resulted in the well-deserved punishment of the perpetrators.

What the Jewish tradition was—a tradition, be it remembered, absolutely undisputed and unchallenged until recent times—is shown by the statement of Josephus. After remarking that the first year of Cyrus was the seventieth since the people had gone into captivity to Babylon, and that then God remembered His mercy, as He had promised them through Jeremiah before Jerusalem was destroyed, he adds that God stirred up the mind of Cyrus and caused him to write throughout all Asia—"Thus saith Cyrus the king: since the Most Mighty God has proclaimed me king of all the world, I am



persuaded that this is He Whom the nation of the Israelites worship. For He foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build His temple in Jerusalem in the land of Judæa." Josephus then proceeds, "Now Cyrus learnt this by reading the book which Isaiah left of his prophecy two hundred and ten years before." After citing the substance of the prophecy as to Cyrus, he remarks, "These things Isaiah prophesied a hundred and forty years before the Temple was destroyed. A certain impulse and eagerness then seized Cyrus, on reading these things, and marvelling at their Divine character, to fulfil what was written; therefore having called together the most distinguished men of the Jews that were in Babylon, he told them that he consented that they should return to their fatherland and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God" (*Ant.* xi. 1. 1, 2).

The statement of Josephus is, in light of the known history, consonant with a broad, common-sense view of the facts. We can but repeat that it would be extremely unlikely that the king should have acted as he did, unless the predisposing evidence had seemed very cogent to him and his advisers.

Our next piece of evidence is the implicit testimony borne by all known MSS. of the Hebrew text. In all of these, the Book of Isaiah stands one and undivided. The LXX., it is well known, represents a recension which sometimes differs a good deal from the Masoretic text; and in this version, due to a period not later than the third century B.C., as in all other ancient versions of the Bible, the same verdict is given.

A weighty witness is that of Ben-Sira, the author of Ecclesiasticus, of which the original Hebrew was written about 200 B.C. Here, in the eulogy on Hezekiah, is a reference to "Esay the prophet," and it is added (48. 23, 24), "In his time the sun went backward, and he lengthened the king's life. He saw by an excellent spirit what should come to pass

at the last, and he comforted them that mourned in Sion. He shewed what should come to pass for ever, and secret things or ever they came."

It will be seen that all the allusions to the prophetic character of Isaiah are drawn from the later chapters (see especially 40. 1, 2; 42. 9; 48. 6; 49. 13; 51. 3; 61. 2, 3).

The New Testament furnishes us with abundant evidence that the Jews of our Saviour's time referred the later chapters to the pen of Isaiah. Again and again these chapters are cited as the work of Isaiah. There is no need to give many instances, since the fact is obvious. The Baptist, in proclaiming himself as the Forerunner, gives us his message, "Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1. 23; cf. Isa. 40. 3). To our Lord in the synagogue at Nazareth is given "the book of the prophet Esaias" (Luke 4. 17), and he begins to read what we know as chap. 61.

Again, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the fifty-third chapter of "Esaias the prophet" when St. Philip was bidden to join him. When St. Paul says (Rom. 10. 20) "Esaias is very bold," he was referring to Isa. 65. 1*f*. See also especially Matt 12. 17; John 12. 41.

We are not prepared to say that we are bound to accept the view on the authority of these Apostles and Evangelists, because it may be urged that they need not be using the name save in a conventional sense, and no element of their argument hinges on the question of authorship. Our Saviour never seems to name Isaiah as the author, and we must be careful not to press the matter beyond what the words of Scripture warrant us in asserting. When our Saviour declares "David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord . . ." (Mark 12. 36; cf. Ps. 110. 1), we believe that two points are ruled for us past all appeal, the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm, and its Messianic character. In the

case of Isaiah we do not urge the like, but we do point out that up to and including our Saviour's time, as well as for centuries after, the idea of the unity of Isaiah is one as to which there was absolutely no doubt.

In the eighteenth century this was first challenged, and it was urged instead that these later chapters were written towards the close of the Exile by a writer unknown, a view modified by more recent critics who refer these chapters to several different hands. Their arguments, of which we must now briefly speak, are, as we have already remarked, entirely inferential. They may broadly be reduced to three main heads. Before, however, we proceed to speak of them, it is important to note that the professed basis of the earliest assailants of the unity of Isaiah distinctly disavowed any belief in the supernatural character of the Old Testament prophecies. Gesenius, for example, "can find no supernatural prediction in the Hebrew prophets," and his treatment, both in his *Commentary* on Isaiah and in his *Thesaurus*, of weighty Messianic prophecies is specially noteworthy. Of course it is in no sense meant, God be thanked, that this disbelief is the underlying basis in the opinions of those who now deny the unity, still that it was from this root that the doubt first sprang is very suggestive, and indeed this point of view is the avowed belief of many recent critics. Thus Dr. Kuenen, who died only a few years ago, speaks of the religion of Israel as merely "one of the principal religions of the world." How completely the Christian religion is bound up with that of Israel need not be dwelt on. He remarks, "For us the religion of Israel is one of those religions, nothing less, but also nothing more."

The first objection brought against the Isaianic character of the later chapters is the argument derived from the differences in style and vocabulary from those of the earlier chapters. In

answer to this we would urge the exceeding untrustworthiness of arguments as to style, except when used to modify or confirm definite objective evidence. Who, without such evidence, would be likely to refer the Odes and Satires of Horace to the same pen? Or compare the vocabulary and the style of the Epistle to the Romans with those of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. Or let us take an example from our own times. Suppose that as many centuries shall roll over the world as now separate us from the times of Isaiah, and that scholars of those far-off days are studying the poems of Tennyson. Save for the external evidence, can we fancy that a single student would see as the outcome of the same mind the noble elegy of *In Memoriam* and the Hogarthian pictures of the *Northern Farmers* and the *Village Wife*?

In speaking like this, we do not for a moment mean that the styles of the two halves of "Isaiah" are so markedly different, though, of course, to a certain extent, they do differ. Between the beginning and end of Isaiah's prophetic career fifty years at least must have elapsed, and in fifty years the changes in a man, and such a man, may well have worked changes in the written style; the more so, when we think of the events which had shaped that life and which it had helped to shape, as well as of the widening horizon opened to him in his later years.

If we believe the story of the great invasion and the great deliverance as the Bible tells it us, and if we realise how the mind of Isaiah was the main agent in God's purpose for the training of His people, surely we can easily believe that the mind which had passed through such an experience would, by virtue of that experience, rise to higher and yet more glorious levels than before.

It would be a very false view to take of what that level is, to maintain that the purpose mainly regarded in the

later chapters of Isaiah is the promise of deliverance to the exiles in Babylon. This is, indeed, one underlying purpose, but there is a deeper intention therein, the promise of a greater deliverer than Cyrus, saving men from a worse tyranny than that of Babylon. For this we have the highest warrant of all, the words of Him who said: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." He Himself declared that the words "He was reckoned among the transgressors" were fulfilled in Him. But if this is so, who can wonder that the diction often assumes a loftier cast?

But it would be unfair to assert that a study of Isaiah only discloses dissimilarities between the two parts; striking similarities of style and diction also exist, as even Gesenius allows;\* and the deductions from this part of the line of attack must be called precarious. Moreover, modern "criticism" is of a somewhat Protean aspect in this matter. A leading English higher critic, writing in 1882, remarked:† "My own opinion is that the peculiar expressions of the latter prophecies are, on the whole, *not such as to necessitate a different linguistic stage from the historical Isaiah*; and that consequently the decision of the critical question will mainly depend on other than purely linguistic considerations." The same critic, writing in 1894, remarked,‡ "*If there is such a thing as the history of the Hebrew language*, the last twenty-seven chapters of the Book are not the work of the historical Isaiah, but of a much later writer or school of writers." In other words, the linguistic question enters into the essence of the problem. [The italics in both passages are ours.]

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\* One critic who denied the unity of the Book of Isaiah held nevertheless that cc. 40-66 were attached to the true Isaianic prophecies, because of the marked similarity of their style and manner to his.

† Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, II. 240.

‡ *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, p. 271.



It is urged in the second place that the author of chapters 40-66 writes from a Babylonian standpoint, that the "historic background" is Babylonian. Yet if this is a well-established truth, we ought to find reasonable unanimity among the critics. Yet Ewald, who is not reckoned in the ranks of "mere traditionalists," sees an "Egyptian background," though he assumes certain portions to be embodied from a prophet of the reign of Manasseh. After dwelling on various details, which he holds to point to Egypt, such as the reference to the northern parts of the Chaldæan kingdom as the ends of the earth, the specific references to Africa, the sacrifice of swine, and the like, he sums up—"The author was according to this a descendant of those who had gone into Egypt with Jeremiah."\*

If then one critic says that the background is Babylonian, another that it is Egyptian; if, again, to some the whole is exilic, to others exilic and post-exilic, while others see pre-exilic elements, it may well be thought that the evidence under this head is not very convincing. Moreover, we may well ask ourselves, is there really any great amount of Babylonian local colouring in these chapters? Is there more than a man in Isaiah's position would naturally learn in the ordinary way, from conversation with the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan, for example, or from the reports of travellers? Not a few critics, who entirely deny the Isaianic authorship, allow that there is not much Babylonian colouring. Professor Cheyne candidly admits that on the contrary there are passages favourable to the theory of a Palestinian origin. For example, the trees in 41. 19 are not for the most part natives of Babylonia, while the commonest of the Babylonian trees, the date-palm, is not once mentioned. The reference to "subterranean holes" in 42. 22,

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\* *Prophets of the Old Testament*, IV. 256, Eng. Trans.

and to "torrent-beds" in 57. 5, is "altogether inapplicable to the alluvial plains of Babylonia." To add here an illustration of a different kind, we would point out that the reference in 43. 23, 24, is quite as consistent with the view that the words were addressed to a people living within reach of the temple-service, as that it refers to a state of things seen in the far past. It should be noticed that in verse 23 we have the three technical words for sacrifice and offering, *olah*, *zebach*, and *minchah*, together with incense (*lebonah*). It is not easy to see much relevance in this verse, if, when these words were written, the people were in Babylonia, unable, from the nature of the case, to offer sacrifices at all.

It is alleged, *per contra*, by some critics, that the mention of the "mirage" (*sharabh*: Isa. 35. 7, 49. 10) as an atmospheric phenomenon characteristic of Babylonia, is a clear point in favour of the exilic date. It is well to remark that chap. 35 is taken away from Isaiah by the critics, though they do not seem to be much in accordance as to where they will place it. Dr. Driver puts it at the beginning of the exile, Dr. Dillmann at the end of the exile, and Professor Cheyne gives it a post-exilic date.

In the first place, we must express a very decided doubt whether the word means *mirage* at all. Clearly it is only by extreme violence to the passage that such a meaning could hold good in 49. 10, and the evident reminiscence connecting the two passages would itself naturally forbid a meaning impossible in one of the two. The natural view would be to take the meaning of "heat" in 49. 10, and by metonymy in 35. 7, "that which is heated" ("parched ground," A.V.; "glowing sand," R.V.). This view is that taken by the LXX. (*ἡ ἀνύδρος, καίσων*; the latter word being that used for the burning east wind in Jonah 4. 8), the Vulgate (*quæ erat arida, æstus*), and the Peshito Syriac, which similarly differentiates the two instances. The Targum of Jonathan has two different, slightly modified spellings of the Hebrew word. Yet what the Chaldee root really means may be seen from the occurrence of only slightly varying derivatives in Isa. 25. 4 ("shadow from the *heat*"), in Gen. 8. 22 ("cold and *heat*"), in Psalm 32. 4 ("drougths of summer"). Clearly the plainly established meaning of the various Chaldee words from the root *sh'rahk* militates decidedly against the hypothesis, for it is nothing more, of *mirage*; leading some to suggest a derivation from the Persian.

We would urge, secondly, that for the inference from a mention of *mirage* to have any force, it would be requisite that this phenomenon should be peculiar to, or, at any rate, specially characteristic of, Babylonia. Yet the phenomenon must have been a familiar one to the Israelites in the deserts near Palestine.

Professor Cheyne assigns portions, *inter alia*, of chapters 57 (which, it will be remembered, Ewald had referred to the reign of Manasseh, a century before the beginning of the Exile), and 65, to a post-exilic period, the fifth century B.C., and to the descendants of the returned exiles in northern Palestine. If the critics who so scornfully reject the current view agreed in any reasonable degree in the view they put forward in its place, there would be stronger *primâ facie* grounds for considering their statement. Yet theory follows theory, and a comparison of different editions of works of some critics will shew how subjective the whole is—a hypothesis the foundation, more hypotheses the superstructure.

Yet there is a sense in which the standpoint of these later chapters is Babylonian, though we have urged that it is not that of a writer resident in Babylonia. The words of Isaiah's prophecy to Hezekiah, ushered in by the solemn words "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts," on the occasion of the visit of the Babylonian envoys, give, it may well be believed, the keynote to all the succeeding chapters. To the king, to the prophet himself, to all Israel, the prophecy must have been startling in its utter apparent unlikelihood. Yet to the prophet himself, the thought, once started, would be the dominant idea of his heart for the rest of his life, even were we dealing merely with the poetic imaginings of human genius. Yet if we believe that something above human thought prompted the words "All that is in thy house . . . shall be carried to Babylon, and of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt

beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon," then surely it is not wrong to believe that this holy man of old spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost in the long course of evangelic prophecies which follows.

The prophecy then of chapter 39 is evidently one of crucial importance, and it is interesting accordingly to notice the views taken of it by various critics. Ewald reduces the declaration to Hezekiah, setting at naught its solemn introduction, to a mere piece of political shrewdness on Isaiah's part:—"It flashed like lightning across Isaiah's mind that Babylon, attracted by those very treasures which Hezekiah, not without a certain complacency, had displayed to the ambassadors, might in the future become dangerous to that same kingdom of Judah which it was now flattering."\* Professor Driver remarks: "The embassy of Merodach-baladan, the temporary 'king' of Babylon, to Hezekiah, afforded Isaiah a substantial motive for announcing (39. 6) a future *exile* to Babylon: it could supply no motive for such a promise of a subsequent *return* from exile as these chapters contain."† We fail to see the justice of either clause. If the former means that native shrewdness enabled Isaiah to make so happy a guess, then indeed his foresight was one absolutely unparalleled. But if, as we presume it means, it was the direct outcome of Divine inspiration, then that God should couple with the threat of judgment the promise of the after deliverance is surely fully in accordance with what we know of God's dealings with his people. Isaiah's contemporary, Micah, dwells both on the captivity to Babylon, and on the return, the outcome of the Divine mercy.

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\* *Hist. of Israel*, IV. 188, Eng. Trans.

† *Isaiah: his Life and Times*, p. 127.

Professor Cheyne has a "short and ready method" with those who differ. He tells us: "The prediction of the subjugation of Judah by the king of Babylon is, for several reasons unconnected with theology, not easily credible as an utterance of Isaiah."\* Or, again, "for several reasons it appears to me improbable that he uttered this prophecy."† That is to say, some editor, reckless of his use of the Sacred Name, invented it as a suggestive introduction for the second part. Another recent critic, to whom we owe a highly valuable work on Isaiah, Professor George Adam Smith, sees in Isaiah's prophecy only a general suggestion:—"Very little might have transferred the seat of power from the Tigris to the Euphrates."‡ How natural was it that Isaiah should be "seized by a strong sense of how near Babylon stood to the throne of the nations," and "should laugh to scorn the excuse of distance, and tell the king that his anxiety to secure an alliance had only led him to place the temptation to rob him in the face of a power that was certainly on the way to be able to do it." But, on such a view, do we not deny to the prophecy its Divine character and consequent validity?

We can but repeat our own conviction: if the prophecy of Isa. 39. 5-7 was uttered by Isaiah, and certainly no one has shewn that it was not, and if we believe that, as he claims, his utterance was Divinely prompted, then a very weighty ground is furnished for the presence of the chapters which follow.

We now come to a point which has been widely urged in connection with the question of the authenticity of the later chapters. It is asserted that the mention of the *name* of the deliverer, Cyrus, is a thing utterly inconceivable as an

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\* *Prophecies of Isaiah*, I. 231.

† *Ibid.*, p. 234.

‡ *The Book of Isaiah*, I. 201.



utterance of Isaiah, a hundred and fifty years before him. It is said that such an idea would be tantamount to a "suspension of the laws of psychology." So, it may be remarked, would be anything miraculous, and if the name of Cyrus be cut out, these chapters still remain distinctly prophetic. Beside any appeal to history, we have the highest evidence of all: the Saviour directly declared that what we call chapter 61 was prophetically spoken of Himself.

A striking parallel to the mention of Cyrus, and one where the period of time covered is a much longer one, is that of Josiah, specially mentioned in 1 Kings 13. 2, three centuries and a half before the prophecy was fulfilled. It is easy to say that the mention of Josiah's name is merely due to a gloss—many critics have said it; but it is as dangerous as it is easy, and leads to a state of things where the critic claims to rise superior to facts. *Rex est super grammaticam.*

It will have been noticed that, in the opening chapters of the second division of Isaiah, that is those in which the special references to Cyrus occur, emphatic stress is laid again and again on the omnipotence and omniscience of God. The Godhead of Jehovah is insisted on as against the nothingness of the idols. A sort of challenge, as it were, runs through the appeal. Jehovah will condescend to prove to men the reality of His Godhead by evidence which they can test for themselves, by declaring things to come which human intelligence could never have guessed. "Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things what they be . . . Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." Anyone who will read carefully chapters 40-48 must feel

that this claim to omniscience, and, therefore, to absolute and sole Deity, runs like a thread through the whole fabric of the prophecy.

If then the chapters in question were penned by Isaiah a century and a half before the fulfilment was vouchsafed, the compelling force of the appeal becomes evident—God condescends to allow His people and the nations to judge of Him by the logic of facts. Well might it be urged “Let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? Have not I the LORD?”

Now let us again read these chapters on the hypothesis that they are penned by some writer unknown, about 540 B.C., a couple of years or so before the fall of Babylon, and when Cyrus was in the full course of victory. Do not the words which the prophet puts in the mouth of God become a mockery—“Who hath declared this from ancient time? Have not I the LORD?” Is it not to impute the extremest blasphemy to the “prophet,” does it not destroy the claim of the book to be viewed as Divinely given for the guidance and comfort of God’s people? Yet we have an authority above appeal, the Saviour’s direct ruling, that what critics call the deutero-Isaiah was distinctly prophetic of Himself, though, even on the “critical” hypothesis, it was delivered more than five centuries before His time.

But again, what of the Israelite exiles in Babylonia? What of the Babylonians themselves? A book pre-eminently meant for the “comfort” of Israel, by virtue of the promises for the future which it contained, is known to the exiles as one written a year or two before, though making such sweeping claims. Surely the “comfort” must have been a very hollow one. One would naturally suppose, too, that the prophecy, such as we believe it to be, would be

shewn to friendly Babylonians; indeed, such a record could not, in any case, be hidden in a corner. Are we to suppose that the Babylonian priests had so little intelligence as to be taken in by a writing claiming to declare future events long before they happened, when it had really been made in the light of what was happening?

If it be allowed that there is any force in these considerations, then surely the mention of the name of Cyrus was a very relevant matter to the challenge. If he were already well known as a conqueror when chapters 44, 45, were written, the challenge would fall very lightly on Babylonian idolaters.

A theory has been put forward by a distinguished English critic, which seems to us to show strikingly to what straits the assailants of the unity are sometimes driven. It is asked why the portion referring to Cyrus should not have been of the nature of an "apology," like the apologies of early Christian writers addressed to Roman Emperors. Thus Cyrus, reading what great things were expected of him, would be led to accept the rôle of deliverer. The solemn words of prophecy, emphasized in every possible way, thus became a piece of political craft. Moreover, we may fairly assume that Cyrus and his experienced advisers would hardly countenance so unusual a step as sending back the Israelite exiles to their own land, without carefully looking into the grounds put forth for it. It would hardly have been difficult, if the above hypothesis were truth, to have laid bare the fraud.

There is just one thought more to which we would refer under this head. There seems to be too much tendency in certain quarters to argue as if the main and essential aim of the later chapters of Isaiah was to declare the return from Babylon. True it is that there is such an intention; but,

important as it is, it is only a secondary ground. The prophecy is, in a profoundly deeper sense, a Messianic Evangel, to which the promise of the return serves but as a basis. Unless this deeper aspect, one which no Christian can doubt to be present, is fully held in mind, we read the chapters with an utterly false perspective. We should find it a difficulty, harder than all the other difficulties attending these chapters, were we required to believe that, for example, chapters 40, 53, 60, 61, had no further reference than to a return from Babylon. Whatever the writer, and those for whom he first penned them, may have felt, we with the Gospel light on the prophecy can feel that there is a vastly extended horizon. The language would be out of all proportion, if the return alone were thought of.

We have now briefly spoken of the arguments drawn from the language of the book, and from the "historic background." Objections are also alleged on the ground of differences in the "theological background." It will be well to ask ourselves carefully what this phrase amounts to. Phrases of this kind sometimes get repeated without sufficient consideration. We may have two writers whose positions are directly antagonistic, but such a case may be dismissed here. Or we may have two writers whose doctrinal teaching is so plainly complementary one to another, as in the case of St. Paul's and St. James's treatment of the question of faith and works, that nothing but the directest objective evidence would satisfy us that we had works from the same pen. Nothing of this kind can be alleged as between the two parts of Isaiah.

The word "development" is a favourite with critics in this matter. It is maintained, and truly, that the doctrine of Atonement is plainly laid down in chapter 53, but nothing of the kind can be found in the first forty chapters. It

is said, therefore, the thought is clearly a later development. We are glad here to refer to a remark in a valuable little book on the unity of Isaiah, by Dr. John Kennedy, from which we have derived some useful suggestions. The word "development" is a natural one in dealing (say) with mathematical or physical science. Each fresh discovery carries on the knowledge of experts to a further point, each fresh theory is confirmed, or modified, or falsified, as facts increase. This is true, natural, development, capable of being tested step by step. But divine prophecy is not a human science, it is given "at sundry times and in divers manners" as God willed it, not as prophets managed to discover or theorise. There is no *a priori* reason why a pre-exilic prophet should not be enabled to put forth the doctrine of the Atonement as much as an exilic or post-exilic one. Dr. Kennedy, referring to the phrase "the prophet *conceived* so and so," urges his objection very justly thus: "It implies, or seems to imply, that not the Inspiring Spirit, but the prophet's mind, was the originating cause of the prophecy and of the ideas involved in it. The prophet's mind first, the Divine Spirit second: I would reverse this order—the Divine Spirit first, the prophet's mind second."

Let it freely be admitted that there is a difference of topic: the earlier chapters picture for us the Messianic king, the later the servant of the LORD. Yet is it not treating a writer in somewhat Procrustean fashion to deny him some latitude in the choice of topics which he wishes to vary according to the needs of his purpose? St. Paul dwells, now on the practical working of the Church in his letters to Timothy and Titus, now on the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith to the Romans and Galatians, now on the transcendental spiritual topics to the Ephesians. Yet we do not doubt that it is the same Paul throughout.



Moreover, we are, perhaps, the less inclined to be swayed by critics in this particular instance of Isaiah, when we find them differing as to whether the image of the servant of Jehovah does or does not display "features in the description borrowed from the earlier portraits of the Messianic king."

With critics differing as to what development is, with the difference of the "theological standpoint" merely amounting to the fact that certain topics are more prominent in the earlier chapters, and certain others in the later chapters, when too there is a total absence of objective evidence which might be confirmed or modified by inferential arguments, we can but avow our own belief that, as between two views—viz., that, making all reasonable allowance for reverent editorial action, Isaiah 40-66 is the work of the last years of the prophet's life, or, on the other hand, that it is due to a much later writer (or writers)—no solid argument has yet been adduced from the theology which should make us lean to the latter hypothesis as against the former.

We have now given a very brief general survey, in which we have sought to avoid details and put the matter broadly, over the main lines of attack on the unity of Isaiah. It will be well now to consider shortly some difficulties in which the acceptance of the novel hypothesis would land us.

We again repeat that it must be remembered that we have absolutely no trace of an "Isaiah," save as one and undivided. Yet if the new theory be correct, the chapters from the fortieth onward must once have existed in a separate form, whether in one portion or several, and have been attached subsequently, in some way and for some reason or other, to the true Isaiah. Whether with Ewald we regard chapters 40-66 as the prophecy of the "great unnamed prophet" of the exile, or, with later critics, disintegrate again, and make chapters 56-66 post-exilic,

this is of course equally true, though the difficulty is considerably increased on the latter view.

Whether then we call chapters 40-66, or only chapters 40-55, exilic, we have *a* great exilic poet. Still, while a prophet is in a sense a poet, and the author of these chapters a poet who has been rarely indeed equalled, yet, let us urge, a prophet is a good deal more than a poet.

A poet may indite his poetry, as he will and when he will, on such subjects as take his fancy; he may give it forth to the world for his fame or profit, he may keep it by him (Horace, it will be remembered, proposed to let it lie by for nine years), or he may even destroy it. Yet in none of these points does the prophet stand on the same footing. He pens his prophecies, when and as he is moved by the Holy Ghost, he may not put them by or destroy them, but must give them forth to his people. The words are a message from God to man, transmitted through the human agency of the prophet. The exilic prophet Ezekiel leaves us in no doubt of his Divine commission.

On the "critical" hypothesis, then, some prophet published a prophetic message towards the end of the exile; it was accepted as a Divine utterance by the nation, as the fact shews, so that its authority, and the evidence of the public commission of the writer, were fully accepted by the Israelites who first received it. Those, therefore, who first read it, or heard it, held it to be a prophecy, and knew, must have known, the prophet's name. Yet between the generation of Zerubbabel and of Ezra, we must not only suppose that this knowledge (a knowledge on a point which would evidently be strongly insisted on) had completely died out, but people tacitly accepted the idea that it was Isaiah's prophecy. Test such a matter in respect of a book, save one forming part of the Bible, and the argument would at once be allowed to be reasonable.

But now comes a further question. It is surely puzzling that tradition should die out as to the name of so gloriously endowed a writer as the man who penned chapters 40-66, or even chapters 40-55. On the theory he must have been more or less contemporaneous with Haggai, whose name and date and commission are carefully recorded, yet for genius and power of language and beauty of diction the two cannot be compared together. But the further puzzle arises: grant that the name somehow became forgotten, by what chance did it come about that the prophecies were assigned to Isaiah? Why was not the prophecy distinctly retained as anonymous, like some of the Psalms? Of course, whether we assign the chapters from the fortieth onwards to one writer or several, an explanation has to be found, though the difficulty is doubtless greater if we suppose that there were several.

As for some of the theories which are put forward, we cannot think that they can claim even verisimilitude. What can be thought of the suggestion that when an ancient scribe found a portion of his volume remaining blank, he would insert in the empty space some other writing that filled up the gap? Are we to suppose too that if the writing proved in the result too long, the overplus would be omitted?

Or what of the idea that it was wished to equalise the size of the four volumes of prophecy, and Isaiah alone would have been much smaller than the other three, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets? One wonders why, on such a hypothesis, following the analogy of the volume of Minor Prophets, the editor did not note the names of the authors of the added portions.

There is greater reasonableness in the suggestion of Professor G. A. Smith, that it was natural to add to the prophecies of Isaiah "those prophecies of which the events he pointed to were the vindication and fulfilment." But would not the

Book of Jeremiah have been a more fitting place whereon to append declarations written just before the fall of Babylon, as containing far more definite prophecies of deliverance from Babylon than anything in the undisputed Isaiah?

In conclusion, we would urge a point which we believe is strongly felt by many careful students of Isaiah. Just as not a few critics, including even Gesenius, have seen similarities of style and diction, so are there, we believe, many signs of unity of thought also. We can but touch on an illustration or two, but we believe the list might be very largely increased.

How often must St. Paul when addressing a Jewish audience have pressed the truth "God hath also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life," and in so doing he may well have dwelt on the teaching of the great Evangelical prophet to prove to them that it was no strange doctrine which was sounding in their ears. But to this end he might have cited passages freely from both portions of Isaiah alike. This is of course a truism, but compare on the one hand 2. 3, 4; 9. 2 *f.*; 11. 10; 19. 25; 25. 7, with 42. 1 *f.*, 6; 44. 5; 49. 6; 55; 56. 3 *f.*; 60; 62. 2; 65. 1 *f.*

Take a second point: the earlier chapters set forth for us the image of the Messianic king, and the later ones that of the "servant of Jehovah." Yet whether critics allow that there is some continuity between the two ideas, or only a parallelism, we are thankful to believe, and we have the highest possible warrant for believing, that both of them are a setting forth of the Christ of Nazareth. The point, however, which we would urge now is that both in the earlier and the later chapters alike, the superhuman nature of the Deliverer is laid down. In chapter 9. 6, indeed, the "Child" Who "is born to us" is plainly called the "Mighty God," and, though there is nothing as explicit as this in the later chapters, it is none the less implicitly taught. Of no mere human teacher could

the words of 42. 1-4 conceivably be used, or the glorious Evangel of chapter 61.

The personality of the Holy Spirit is plainly indicated in both portions of the book, compare 11. 2 with 61. 1. Let just one illustration more be taken, which is no illustration merely of similarity of diction, but sets forth a profound truth animating the whole book. The Divine title "The Holy One of Israel" is seldom found in the Old Testament outside the Book of Isaiah.\* In that book it occurs *twenty-three* times; *ten* times in chapters 1-39, and *thirteen* times in chapters 40-66. In other words, the thought of the Divine holiness is a prominent idea throughout the whole book. Are we to suppose that the writer or writers of the later chapters simply sought to imitate in this the true Isaiah? Other illustrations will occur to the careful reader, but we feel that enough has been said to shew that a very striking unity of thought, though an underlying one, pervades the two portions of the book.

That the arguments urged against the unity of Isaiah are merely imaginary, we do not for a moment assert. With the similarities of style, the dissimilarities are admitted, yet Christians do not refuse to allow that the Pastoral Epistles are Pauline, merely because the style is somewhat different from that of the Epistle to the Romans. What we would say is this: against the historical view handed down to us, a certain number of inferences are urged. The arguments based on some of these inferences are, we venture to think, very far from being established, and as regards the rest we can but "oppose subjectivity to subjectivity." The belief that is challenged is, so to speak, in possession, and we once more repeat that we are firmly convinced that the theory which would replace the old belief is Not Proven.

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\* The only other cases are Jer. 50. 29; 51. 5 (which are of course post-Isaian), and Ps. 71. 22; 78. 41; 89. 18 (19, Heb.). 2 Kings 19. 22 is merely a replica of Isa. 37. 23.



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7 But when ye pray, <sup>d</sup> use not vain  
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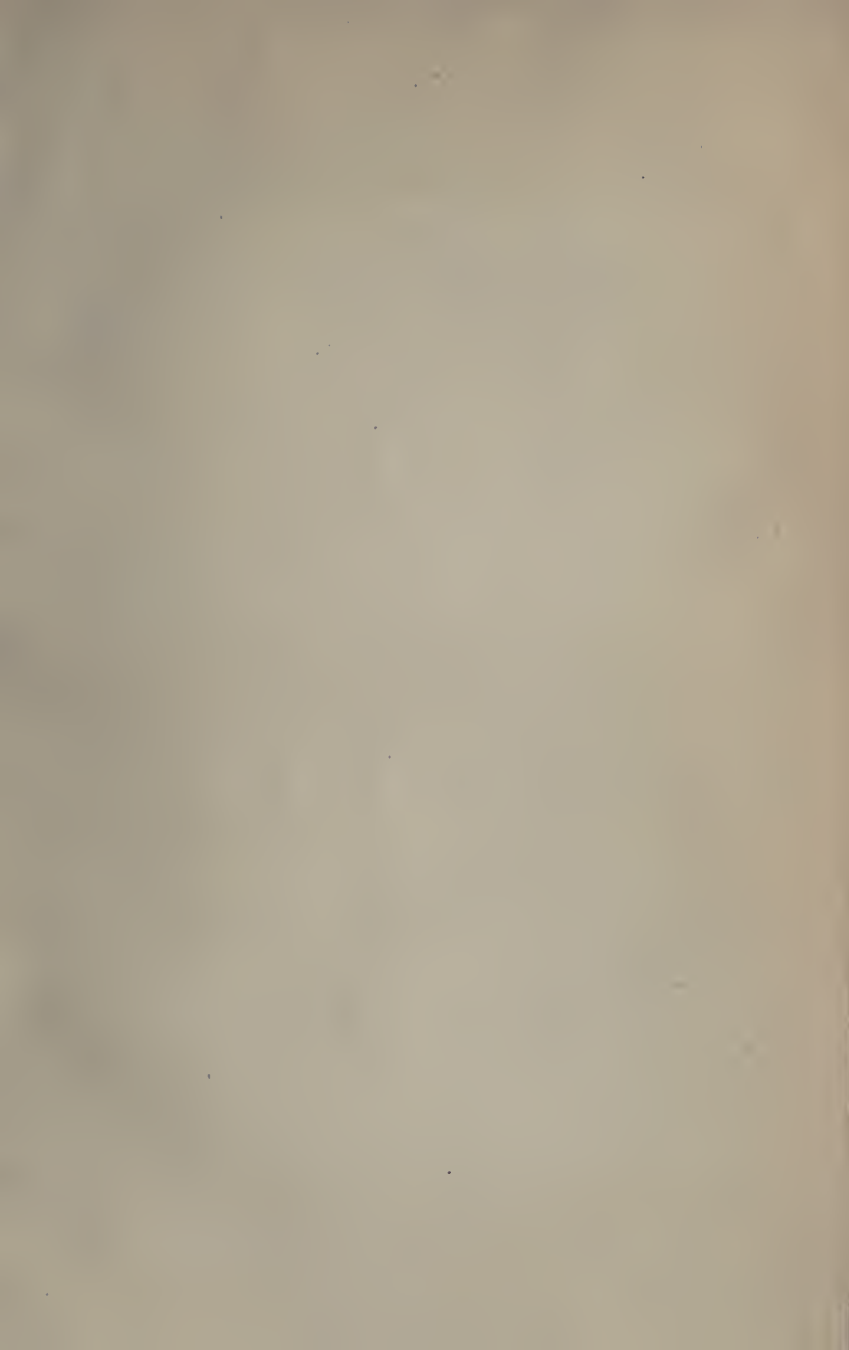
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